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THE HONOURABLE ELLA

A TALE OF FOXSHIRE

BY

THE EARL OF DESART

AUTHOR OF

"KELVERDALE,"

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE HONOURABLE ELLA

A TALE OF FOXSHIRE.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

FOXSHIRE.

EVERYONE, of course, knows Foxshire. That is, everyone interested in any way—and who is not?—in that noble sport which, according to the Iron Duke, trains up heroes to win on the sterner fields of war; and, according to its defenders, when professorial vulpecides come to the front, knits all classes of

society together in the bonds of good fellowship and healthy emulation. But, as there may possibly be some degenerate subscribers to the libraries who are ignorant of the county's whereabouts, let us make it clear to them before we commence our veracious history.

With the map of our happy country before you, picture to yourself a crow, weary of watching the white-sailed yachts ploughing the waters off our southern shores, taking wing at Selsea Bill, and flying straight to York, there to perch on the glorious walls of the Minster. Imagine another crow, sick of the extreme Low Churchism and incomprehensible cawing of the Welsh crows at Aberystwith, flying across the island to pick up a bargain in imitation Oriental china at Lowestoft. Where these two adventurous crows would meet would be the very centre of

Foxshire, just where the old county town of Foxborough stands and has stood, without much change, these many hundred years.

It is possible, oh, geographically-learned reader! that you may turn from your map and exclaim, with derision, that there is no Foxshire there; that we have indicated the part of the world where exquisitely-clad youths on three hundred guinea hunters go out in all their bravery to meet the Pytchley, the Quorn, and the Billesdon Hounds; but do not be too sure. Let us tell you a secret. There has been here a suppression among the geographers, and for this reason. No geographer was ever known to ride to hounds. No one who cannot ride to hounds can exist in Foxshire. You cannot survey a county without going into it. So no geographer ever surveyed Foxshire.

Q.E.D. All you have to do is to stretch England a little, so that a large empty space is left—bounded by Leicestershire, Rutlandshire, Northamptonshire, and Warwickshire—and then you have Foxshire, with the town of Foxborough in the exact centre.

In describing the inhabitants of Foxshire it would be necessary to begin with the Earl of Lorton, of Braye House. Although a good many of the large-acred squires of the county considered themselves greater men than his lordship, still he was Lord Lieutenant of the county; wore the blue ribbon of the Garter on grand occasions; attended—or, perhaps, we should say might have attended if he chose—Her Majesty's Privy Council; and had even in the dim past been, as a very promising young peer, selected to perform the duties of Under-Secretary for Foreign

Affairs. But a fondness for cards and horse-racing, with a total inability to understand the grand fact that there are but twenty shillings in a pound, had gradually run away with the greatness of his family, as far as it lay in wealth, and had accumulated a vast amount of mortgage, and worse than mortgage, upon his broad acres. These acres, too, had become far less broad, for he was the last in the entail; and of some 40,000 there remained only about 10,000 to descend to Viscount Hazelhatch, the only son.

Wherefore many men in the county were inclined to sniff and curl their lips when Lord Lorton took the lead in any public manner, and, perhaps, scarcely understood that the more he went down in the world, the more inclined he was to assert that right of taking the lead. Hu-

man nature is generally the last thing human beings learn to understand.

One of those who were most inclined to dispute the supremacy of the Lord Lieutenant of the county, however, was a man who could put forward no claim to wealth. Thomas de Longueville Bannerburn, of Castle Dorington, was the representative of an old family that had long ago reached the top of the hill, and was well down the other side. There was no doubt whatever that, compared with the Bannerburns, the Brayes (Lord Lorton's family name was Braye) were a mushroom race; and, perhaps, there was some degree of foundation for the claim Mr. Bannerburn made that he was in very truth the eighteenth Baron Dorington, although he had never managed to persuade the Committee of Privileges of the House of Lords of the fact, much money (which he could ill spare) as

he had spent in attempting to do so.

Castle Dorington was one of those old houses which you cannot see without longing to possess, and which you can scarcely possess without a secret desire to exchange it for a "mansion with all modern conveniences," as the auctioneers say.

It was picturesque, delicious, crumbling, ivy-grown, musty, and desperately uncomfortable.

But there was not a man within twenty miles who would not sit in its draughts and partake of its somewhat meagre fare for months together, for the sake of looking at the sweet face and form and listening to the voice of its honorary hostess, Mr. Bannerburn's daughter, "the Honourable Ella."

But it would be infamous to introduce the heroine to the reader at the end of a chapter.

CHAPTER II.

THE HONOURABLE ELLA.

MR. BANNERBURN, much as he insisted on his right to the Barony, was often obliged, for business purposes, to content himself with the plain common name; but no such obligation rested on him with regard to his only child, and he so pertinaciously and defiantly gave her her full title that it at last became a sort of joke throughout the county; and from the age of ten the young lady was known far and wide as "the Honourable Ella." As she grew up to understand matters, she objected, naturally enough, to the

implied ridicule of the *sobriquet;* but it was hard to rebel without hurting her father's feelings, or without ranging herself publicly on the side of his enemies, as he considered those who refused him his title; and she was therefore forced to submit to the honour thus thrust upon her, and even allow the young gentlemen of the county to call her "the Honourable Ella" to her face without other remonstrance than an increase of dignity towards them. And Ella Bannerburn was not a very dignified person, her charm being in her softness, her sweetness, and a caressing brightness which had in it a charm such as no men and few women could quite withstand. A gentle spirit of fun laughed in her large brown eyes, and in her small, well-shaped mouth a spirit of fun mingled with a kind of pleading for sympathy, and occasionally, when she was moved, with a power of ex-

pressing sympathy that no words could have emulated. There was perhaps coquetry in her graceful movements, in her arch glances, even in the desperately tantalising manner in which she was wont to pet and soothe her father; but it was a coquetry in which you felt instinctively there was no harm, no cruelty, and not a very great amount of vanity.

"There never was faire woman yet but she made mouths in a glasse;" and it would be absurd to write of any pretty girl that she was ignorant of her prettiness. There are always men and looking-glasses to tell her of the fact. But Ella Bannerburn rather looked upon her undoubted beauty as pleasant, in that it enabled her to give pleasure to others; as an adjunct that made life certainly brighter to her, but not as the very brightness of life itself. If she had lost it all, perhaps

there would have been just a sigh or two, but there would have been no souring of her disposition, no bitterness, or tragedy regrets. To do her duty to her beloved father was pleasant enough when he could pinch her ear and tell her she was his beautiful darling; it would still be pleasant even though he could no longer take delight in watching her face; and her deepest regret for the loss of her looks would have been the loss of this pleasure to him.

Thomas Bannerburn was one of those men who cannot get out of the groove accident has forced them into; or, if they do extricate themselves, it is only to enter one still narrower. In his early days he had been hunting mad; six days a week in the winter, and a summer divided between gazing at the hounds in kennel and horses in stable, or spent in talking over the past season's sport with a select circle of

sportsmen during a hasty visit to town to see horses. And then he had had a bad fall, and been very near departing for the happy hunting grounds of another world. In his weakness he was "got hold of," as his cronies phrased it, by a Low Church relative, and when he came back to his primitive health and vigour it was only to give up his hounds, sell his horses, and pack away red coats, boots, and breeches out of sight for ever.

"To think that I should have wasted all these years galloping over the country after a fox!" he said; and he prayed sincerely that his late associates might not—they refusing to follow his example—find their portion in the fiery lake of brimstone.

But, unfortunately for Mr. Bannerburn's fixity of faith, the earnest preacher and prophet at whose feet he learned the gentle precepts of that belief which consigns the

majority of our fellow-creatures to perdition while saving ourselves; the man who had, as he said, taught him at length what Truth was, suddenly absented himself from the hall where they met each Sabbath; and it was discovered, after he had been some time away, that the money-box, full of the proceeds of a stirring appeal for funds he had lately made, had departed also.

Then Mr. Bannerburn shook the dust off his feet, and settled down into a grim belief in nothing much except Honour, Birth, and—his daughter.

He invented a code of Honour for himself, wrote it down on parchment, and read it out each morning ere he rose. It was a stern, unpitying, unforgiving code; justice, as far as we may know what justice means; but no mercy, which is the justest part of justice after all.

As to the punishment which attended the breaking of the laws of this code he had rather a vague notion; except that the man or woman who did break them would incur his perpetual contempt and hatred, which, as he lived a secluded country life, would scarcely have been a great terror to many.

He was not a popular man, though many pitied him, and excused his grimness and occasional unpleasantness of speech. For one of the greatest misfortunes that can befall a man had come upon him when Ella was but a small child.

"She is dead," he said to some one trying to condole with him; "do not say anything against her. She is dead."

And the erring woman's name never passed his lips again.

There was, as we have hinted, one soft spot in his heart. In the gloom of his

life there was a sunbeam; in his almost hopelessness there was a hope. His daughter was more to him than anything, save Honour, more even than the pride of Birth he cherished so fiercely.

"You will be the only Bannerburn of the direct stock left when I am gone, Ella," he said one day, stroking her little head; "and, though I have sometimes wished you were a boy, I was wrong. There is not money enough, and marrying an heiress is a scurvy way of setting a family up after all. Let us end worthily, as we began, my Ella. If you remember the Code it will be so."

"Is there nothing besides the Code, papa?"

"What should there be?"

"Mr. Manisty says——"

"Mr. Manisty is a parson, and is paid to say those things."

"But the Code is so cold and hard, papa."

"So is the world, dear. Very cold and hard. Softness is cowardice; warmth is hypocrisy or hysterics."

"But Mr. Manisty is neither hysterical nor a hypocrite."

"Is he not? I don't know. I hear good of him, and I believe he does his duty. If I did not believe him to be an honourable, just man—quite apart from his being a parson—I should never have allowed you to go there so much. You like religion, Ella?"

"Oh, papa!"

"Well, my dear, if it makes you happy, I do not see how it can do you harm. It made me happy once, till I knew the Truth."

"Was it the truth you knew, papa? or was it only that the form of religion you believed in then was so——?"

But he checked her by laying his hand playfully on her mouth, as he always did when they reached this point: and they spoke of other things.

Mr. Bannerburn was not a narrow-minded man as to ordinary things. Although he had never gone back to hunting, and still looked upon it as a waste of time and money, Ella had her hunter and a pony-carriage with which to go to the meets. Mr. Manisty, the Rector of Coalbridge (close to Castle Dorington), or one of his sons, escorted her during the day; and when she came home, with her soft hair somewhat dishevelled and the glow of health and exercise upon her cheeks, her father would listen with deep sympathy to her account of the run. And as in Foxshire there were many young ladies all thirsting for fame as straight riders, each of these runs was as exciting

and important in her eyes as a competitive examination.

When our story opens, Ella Bannerburn had attained the age of seventeen, and had broken as many hearts in the county as any young person of her standing there.

Her flirtations were innocent, but they were conducted with much natural skill, and many a youthful squire or younger son was driven to the verge of desperation by her mocking glances and half bantering replies, when he was trying hard to impress upon her his unalterable determination to die or to be loved. On her seventeenth birthday she was very nearly heart-whole—very nearly, but not quite.

Young Lord Hazelhatch was certainly one of the best-looking young men in the county, or, for the matter of that, in any county round. He could ride; why, even the old squire of Tambleby, the Nestor of

fox-hunting, declared that he had never seen a young 'un with a better seat, better hands, a cooler head, or a keener eye for a country. He could shoot as few in those parts could. He had been in the eight at Eton. He could talk, sing a little, write verses a little, make love capitally. He stood about six feet in his boots, had a beautiful slim figure, curly chestnut hair, a soft moustache, and an expressive eye. What wonder that few maidens who met him went home quite fancy free after that meeting?

Ella Bannerburn did not escape the common lot—the Hazelhatch fever, as it was called by the cynical middle-aged—and, notwithstanding her keenness for sport, perhaps the pleasantest part of her day was when his road home happened to coincide with hers; when the rector or his son would tactically drop behind, and leave

the two young people to jog along together side by side.

Old Mr. Manisty—the most popular parson and neatest rider in Foxshire—having a numerous and rather unpleasing family, doted upon Ella, and the pet wish of his heart was that the heir of Braye, this beautiful young Lord Hazelhatch, might make of her the future Lady Lorton. It was, indeed, his solicitude on this point, shown to her too pointedly once or twice, that had first made her conscious that the young gentleman's presence was different to her from that of the many other swains who sighed and said pretty things.

But—let the budding flirtation proceed as it may—there was an obstacle to the fulfilment of the worthy clergyman's wishes, which perhaps may be best explained by a glance into Lord Lorton's study at Braye House.

Lord Lorton, a well-preserved man of sixty, with the remains of what must have been extreme good looks, with the softest and silkiest of white hair, and with a white moustache twisted as Napoleon III. taught his officers to twist theirs, is seated in a comfortable chair, enjoying the cigar that tastes so well after breakfast. Enter to him her ladyship, a fat, amiable-looking lady, with rather a harassed expression, not unmixed with fear, upon her face.

"Lorton, Grimbles has written again."

Grimbles was the butcher who supplied the family when they were in London for the season.

"Ah—Grimbles," said Lord Lorton, reflectively, blowing some smoke in the air. "He doesn't write well—not even grammatically, nor is his spelling quite according to rule. Yet he manages to express himself clearly enough, which is,

after all, what all writers aim at. To have something to say, and to say it so that no reader can mistake your meaning; that is the very perfection of the art of composition. Don't you agree with me, my dear?"

Lady Lorton reddened with annoyance.

"I wish you wouldn't be so silly, Lorton. He writes to say that at last he *will* be paid."

"The man's a master of style," said his lordship again, reflectively. "You see how he saves himself. He says he will be paid. Well, that's uncommonly doubtful. But he puts in that artful 'at last.' Perhaps at the very last—indeed, it may be in another world—he may be paid. Poor Mr. Grimbles!"

"Oh, it's useless talking to you! But what is to be done? What am I to do?"

"Masterly inactivity is, I think, in this case the only course."

"But you know he'll do something; and the disgrace. Your butcher!"

"My dear, I think there is some confusion in your mind here. I know what you mean. I'm a peer, and he's a butcher. True. But now, as a point of argument, I am prepared to maintain that it is more disgraceful for a butcher to be unpleasant to a peer than for a peer to keep a butcher waiting a little."

"But you know he has waited four years."

"Has he? Then how absurd of him to mind waiting the fifth! *Il n'y a que le premier pas qui coûte.* Once you begin waiting I really don't see why you shouldn't go on. I'm owed hundreds—thousands, indeed—by friends who have no memories for bets when they lose them. It is only at first one minds not being paid. If I had been paid, the money would have gone long ago.

As it is, there is always the distant prospect of getting the money, besides the sort of moral elevation I feel every time I meet the men, and pointedly forget the debts. Grimbles should philosophise a little. It wouldn't make him any the worse judge of fat beasts."

"You may be very clever, Lorton, but such nonsense as you talk I never heard. Have you any money at the bank?"

Lord Lorton took his cigar out of his mouth, and looked at her in astonishment.

"Money at the bank! Am I an extravagant man?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps you are right. I may be—in small things. But, Mary, I am *not* extravagant enough to keep my money lying idle in the bank."

"And Mr. Graines tells me he can do nothing just now, having those interests of mortgages to meet."

"Mr. Graines, a very worthy man in other ways, doesn't understand the vice of tautology. He has said the same thing to me so often that the sentence has ceased to have any meaning."

"But how are we to get on?"

"Why should we get on? Are we not very well as we are?"

"I mean, make two ends meet!"

"Why should two ends meet? They talk, by the way, about means to an end. I wonder why, as we have the ends, we haven't the means."

"I never can see any fun in such jokes, Lorton. Things are really very serious. I don't believe you can raise money anywhere now; and after paying these horrid interests there isn't enough to keep any-

thing going. We must give up Grosvenor Square."

"Give up Grosvenor Square! Now, my dear, that only shows that you do not look deep into matters. If we gave up Grosvenor Square, with Violet still unmarried, and panting for London, everyone would say we were ruined. If people say you are ruined, you are ruined."

"What does it matter what people say, if——"

"Matter? Everything. Why, it's all 'say' in this world. They say that you and I are the owners of this house—and all the rest of it. We and our friends say we are the upper class—we say reading and writing mean education—we say——"

"Do stop, Lorton! Will you give me a cheque?"

"Certainly; only, as I got a letter from Bore and Taddle only the other day calling

my attention to my very largely overdrawn account, I fear the cheque wouldn't be much use to you, except as an autograph. As an autograph you are welcome to it."

Her husband's cruel flippancy was too much for Lady Lorton at this point, and she sank into the nearest chair and proceeded to weep. It was her last weapon, but a sure one. He was a soft-hearted man, and, perhaps, under all the affectation of indifference, felt the position almost as keenly as she.

"There—there, my dear, don't make a fuss. I'll drive in and see Graines again this afternoon. I've no doubt there is plenty of money to be had if one only looks round carefully. If it comes to the worst, we will sell No. 47, and then you and Violet can go up to an hotel just for a month or two in the season. Don't make a fuss; nothing is worth that. Things

will look up after next year's Derby; and, besides, there's Hazelhatch. What's the good of the boy if he can't put it all straight?"

"Put it all straight?" said she, with a sob, drying her eyes, and looking very affectionately at her husband.

"Yes—of course. He must marry money."

"An heiress?"

"Yes—there must be a woman attached, I believe."

"*Have* you heard, Lorton," cried her ladyship, jumping up in her excitement—"have you heard about Stanesby Manor?"

"Poor old Stanesby's place? Sold, isn't it?"

"Yes. Sold to the great Mr. Octavius Feyler, of the City!"

"And who may he be? What city?"

"Why, he's the man in—in—all sorts

of companies and things—as rich as possible. He gave two hundred thousand pounds for Stanesby, I hear—*and*, Lorton——"

"Well, my dear?"

"He has a daughter."

"How nice of him! And how many sons?"

"None!"

"That's still more considerate. Well?"

"I haven't called yet, but I mean."

"You mean *to*."

"Yes, I mean I mean to; will you—Harry is so odd about that kind of things—will you speak to him?"

"Harry is young, and likes sentiment. But Harry likes his amusements too. If he could be persuaded that money and sentiment are inseparable, as indeed they are——"

"Oh, Lorton!"

"Are they not? Can you be in love when you have only one shirt, and that frayed at the cuffs? Can you feel passion when you are suffering from the stomach-ache of hunger? My dear, when a dun knocks at the door, Cupid flies out of the window."

"But we love each other a little still, dear?" said his wife, putting a fat hand on his shoulder.

"Yes, but that is only because we are philosophers."

Lady Lorton doubted whether she was a philosopher, but the accusation pleased her. She thought her husband the cleverest and wittiest of men. On one thing she was resolved, that she would lose no time in driving over to Stanesby Manor and leaving his lordship's card upon the great Mr. Octavius Feyler, "of the City."

CHAPTER III.

FATHER AND SON.

THE conversation between Lord and Lady Lorton which we recorded in the last chapter took place at the end of December, when hunting was in full swing; when horses' legs were beginning to become more than suspicious, and when, consequently, money wherewith to purchase sound ones, with a proper complement of those necessary adjuncts, was more necessary to a hunting man than ever.

And as Lord Lorton returned sadly from the stables, after much vain feeling

of an old hunter's swollen limb, and equally vain attempts to believe it was less swollen than the day before, he said to himself, with determination, almost loud enough for his down-hearted stud-groom to hear—

"I *must* have two more! Gad! I'll speak to Harry this very day!"

But his lordship's habit was to postpone the disagreeable, and, remembering that the next day's meet was at Braye House, he decided that perhaps it would be better to put off the possible quarrel his speaking to his son might bring forth until the event of a home meet and big breakfast, at which that son's presence was useful, was over.

He was proud, perhaps a little afraid, of this son who was destined to regenerate the fortunes of the family. Harry Hazelhatch had views of his own, and a direct

way of expressing them, with rather too little respect for the feelings of others, which grated somewhat on ears accustomed only to the smooth white lies of "Society." And Harry Hazelhatch, who had never seen his father serious for a moment, had got into the habit of disbelieving that he could be so, and of rather despising him as a mountebank.

He had never forgotten one occasion when Lord Lorton visited him at Eton, and found him on the eve of being flogged for some fault that he had not committed.

"But I didn't do it, father."

"That won't make the swishing hurt more, my boy."

"But it's unjust—it's a shame!" stammered the boy, his face flushed, and his little hands clenched, tears in his eyes.

"What! afraid of being flogged, Harry?"

"I am not afraid, papa. I don't mind

the swishing a bit; it's because I didn't do it."

"Then you're a martyr, Harry—you know what a martyr is—and there's nothing so pleasant as being a martyr, they say. I've no ambition that way myself. Besides, it'll be a swishing to the good. Next time you *do* do something naughty, and are *not* found out, the account will be squared. And—here's a sovereign for you, my boy."

But, sad to say, the boy flung his father's sovereign away in a passion, and utterly refused to understand the philosophy of the matter.

And now that the boy had grown into a man, he had remained still blind to this philosophy of "don't care." He did care very much. He lived intensely. His pleasures were very pleasant; his griefs very grievous.

Life was real and earnest to his heart, and the young blood coursed swiftly enough through his veins. We do not mean to say that he singled himself out from other young men to gaze at the moon, or to invent theories of after-life, or "to live up to his blue china." He was quite free from the æsthetic hysterics which are becoming fashionable nowadays. His earnestness was manly, straightforward, and honest. Life was a pyramid to him, the thin end of pleasure at the top, and beneath this he never quite forgot the solid base, nor understood how it was possible for so many he saw around him to reverse the pyramid, and balance it with such difficulty on its apex.

Need we say that his parents did not understand him? Lady Lorton simply thought him perfect, and cared to know no more. He was just, she thought, the

proper son of his father; and, with her, praise could no further go. Shocked, indeed, the worthy lady would have been could she have guessed at the real mutual relations between Hazelhatch and his father. She would have been far more sharp-sighted than she was to do so, indeed, for their manner to each other was perfect; nor perhaps did either of them quite understand his own feelings, or quite own to them. All Lord Lorton knew for certain was that he preferred, when in converse with his son, to keep on general and light topics, having on more than one occasion been confused, when obliged for a moment to be serious, by the superior seriousness of the boy.

But now, he felt, it really behoved him to be serious, and, putting on as much dignity as might be, to point out to this alarming son of his the duty that lay be-

fore him—the duty of sacrificing himself for the good of the family fortunes.

"Dulce et decorum est," &c., ran in his head, mixed with a dim idea that he had somewhere read that a nation is a family in large, or a family is a nation in little; but either argument would serve his turn. At any rate he would wait until after the meet at Braye, which was a sort of state occasion. The hounds had originally belonged to the Lortons, and the old custom of a show-meet and breakfast at their place on the first hunting-day in the new year had not fallen into desuetude. At present the master was young George Newsbury, of Averley, who had built magnificent kennels at his place, and who was said to spend about three times the subscription he received from the Hunt Club.

CHAPTER IV.

A FOOL'S PARADISE.

THE grand breakfast is over. Mr. Newsbury, beautifully clad, has mounted his well-bred chestnut—a Blair Athol, you can see at a glance—and Jack Stubb, the huntsman, has received the nod that ends what that unsociable functionary calls "all the fooling about." Hungry farmers have smacked their lips over the Braye House fare, and the unexceptionable old brandy to "top up" with. Red-coated gentlemen, who have breakfasted at home, have finished their pretence of a second meal; but have not neglected the old brandy, even

though there might be nothing to "top up." Ladies with short, workmanlike habits have been helped by their cavaliers, or their grooms—sometimes by their own husbands—on to their well-stuffed saddles. Enormous cigars have been lit, with the inevitable joke as to their being the best way of ensuring a find, as if Reynard were a friend of the tobacconist. The usual gentleman on the tearing-horse has taken a hand-gallop round the park, and comes back with his horse more tearing and uncomfortable-looking than ever. A stream of carriages of various kinds have formed line along the road which leads to the big wood; and soon Jack Stubb's resonant voice is heard encouraging an old hound that has been first to discover the presence of a fox, and calling the attention of the other hounds to this momentous fact; while crack—crack! goes the lash of the

first whip, warning them that the summons is to be quickly obeyed, and striking terror into the head of a puppy, at that moment engrossed by a hearty meal upon a rabbit.

"They always find just here," says Lord Hazelhatch, riding up close beside a young lady, whose neat figure and perfect way of sitting on her horse would have attracted your attention, even had you not happened to catch sight of her face, or been dazzled by a saucy glance of her dark eyes. "But Jack is drawing it wrong, as usual. It's no earthly use pushing the fox that way."

"Poor Jack!" laughed Miss Ella Bannerburn, holding out a tiny hand, and letting it rest for a moment in his. "I thought he was the best huntsman in England."

"So he is—but that doesn't raise him above criticism. And it's so easy to criticise a huntsman. I should like to see

some of the idiots who run him down try to hunt the hounds, or to get a fox out of this beastly wood! By the way, Miss Ella, why didn't you come into the house?"

"Oh, I was late—or at least, Mr. Manisty was. He had two christenings to get over before we could start."

"Oh, he brought you, did he?"

"Yes—why?"

"Oh, I don't know. But I suppose you'd rather have had Bob."

"Bob and I are very old friends, Lord Hazelhatch."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. But the fact is that the rector really suits me much best. He rides so well, and then he doesn't——" She paused and blushed.

He saw the blush, and asked eagerly—"Doesn't do what?"

What Master Bob Manisty did, and his

father did not do, must go to the dark cupboard of secrets with the Man in the Iron Mask and the identity of Junius, for at that moment a whip came splashing up the ride, as fast as his horse could carry him, with the startling intelligence that the fox had gone away at the upper end.

How it was that Hazelhatch and Miss Ella had failed to hear the distant horn and halloa, and how the field had slipped away, and left them alone on the ride, they never could tell; but there was nothing for it but to make the best of their way to the far end of the wood—about two miles of mud, nearly up to the hocks —and to emerge at the hunting-gate—their horses blown, and themselves hot and muddy—to find——absolutely nothing. Hounds and horses had disappeared; and an old keeper coming up informed them that the fox had gone away as straight as

a die for Brabley Gorse. "It's a Brabley fox, my lord, unless I mistook; and he went up wind like a good 'un. You'd best get on the road, and go by the village," he added, with a look of half comic pity at the disappointment in the faces of the young people.

"Straight for Brabley, up wind," gasped the man. "Why, it'll be the run of the season—of any season—*the* great Foxshire run of all seasons. And here we are!"

"Isn't it horrible?" sighed the maid, with a glance at him. "You and I the only ones not to see it."

"There'll be plenty of grief, that's one comfort," said he, grimly. "It's a big country, and the going is desperately deep."

"Yes, that is a comfort," she said, with another little glance at him. "What shall we do?"

"Do! Go home, I suppose," said he,

rather crossly, "I'm not going to gallop along the road all the way, only to meet them coming back."

"He'll be for Brabley, my lord," said the whip, trotting up with some hounds that had been left behind. "It'll be a great thing."

But his lordship quite declined to enter into the probable merits of the run he had lost, for his heart was sore that he—undeniably about the best man to hounds in the country—should miss such a thing; and miss it in such a stupid way. And as he thought this he glanced at his companion with something almost approaching to dislike. Poor little Ella, guessing at his feelings, remained prudently silent, contenting herself with an occasional glance at his face as he opened the first of the five or six gates they had to pass through before they reached the road. The last

was surrounded by such a veritable quagmire that he turned his horse from it, and jumped the fence at the side. Ella followed, and this somehow set them both into a canter; there was a little fence into the road, and a very tempting bit of timber out of it, which, moved by a common impulse, they flew over, quite disregarding the fact that the road was their best way.

There is something soothing to the temper in riding fast, and in his present mood Hazelhatch would have gone at a house, even though he knew a young lady might follow him. Her horse had a hardish mouth, and she could not well pull up as long as he galloped beside her. The canter turned into a gallop; the fences they came to were taken side by side, just as if they were riding to hounds with a burning scent; and it was not till Hazelhatch's horse, jumping a little short,

managed to tumble on his head, and shoot his rider well in front of him on the grass, that the impromptu steeple-chase came to an end.

"You're not hurt?" she asked, as he proceeded to pick himself up, and to extricate his horse's legs from an entanglement with the reins.

"Hurt? No. I think that's done us both good. *How* well you ride! We've come about three miles, I think. Yes; there's Avethorp over there. Well, we've had a run, hounds or no hounds, eh, Ella?"

All his ill-humour had vanished now, and his tone was cordial, even affectionate.

Lord Lorton, pounding away through gates and along convenient lanes in pursuit of the flying pack, and wondering where his first-flight son could be, would have

spurred his horse for vexation could he have seen the expression in that son's eyes as he said, "Eh, Ella?"

And Ella—self-possessed as she usually was, easily as she was accustomed to parry the clumsy gallantry of such as Bob Manisty, or the overdone courtship of Squire Newsbury—seemed quite unable to form a fitting reply to the very innocent little remark, and only looked down and blushed.

Probably most writers of fiction in their youth—in that green youth that is so very green!—have imagined that they would single themselves out from their brothers of the pen by writing a love scene that should be neither unnatural, comical, nor dull, and that should be like the real article; and probably most of these writers, if they have lived to cut their wisdom-teeth, have been fain to con-

fess that only extreme presumption could cherish such a notion.

How can pen and ink depict the glances, the pauses full of eloquence, the subtle electricity with which the air about two lovers is charged? How little there is in the words that are used, how much in the way they are said, in the sweet thoughts —thoughts which are identical in each breast—to which they give rise!

And who could—though he had the pen of all the poets rolled into one—actually convey to an unsympathising intelligence an accurate description of the pang of joy, so great as to be almost pain, that accompanies the moment when the little, soft, confiding hand nestles first in the grasp of the stronger protecting one, moved to it by an influence which is a mystery, but which is the bit of heaven vouchsafed to us on earth?

We do not speak of kissing. Its glories have been sung often enough. It has done the novelist great service; it has been used, perhaps, too freely of late years by a certain school of writers. There have been long kisses and short kisses, kisses that are almost stabs, and kisses that draw ladies' and gentlemen's souls out in long-drawn sweetness; there have been innocent kisses and naughty kisses; there have been kisses in the dark and kisses under the gas. We know all about that time, generally towards the end of the first volume, when "their lips met in one long kiss," and, if the description be good, we perhaps look impatiently round for some one to practise on ourselves. Kissing is overdone, and the novelists of the future will have to invent nose-rubbing or some other mode of commencing love scenes.

But, joking apart, there *is* something tender still left in that involuntary seeking of each other's hands which comes to all young lovers. They want, as it were, to be sure of each other's presence, and the strange electricity of love passes from hand to hand, and they are happy.

Should we sneer at such happiness? Should we, because we find our dolls are stuffed with saw-dust, run about telling those still enjoying their dolls of our discovery?

Oh, no! In these youthful follies we who have been hardened by suffering may re-live a moment of the days when we were foolish and happy. Even if we know of the hollowness of the promises, and can speak bitterly of the falseness of the vows; why should we seek by word or sneer to mar the joys that we have felt once ourselves?

The greatest glory of youth is its credulity; without that, with no sweet past, and with so long and stern a future, what has it?

* * * * * *

As Hazelhatch and Ella Bannerburn rode slowly towards Castle Doringtonwhich ride only took the former about five miles out of his way—the sombre winter's day turned glorious to each of them.

One of the pages of the Book of Life had been unfolded by their novice hands; and the great mystery of love held them in its sweet bondage. Not much did they say. There was but little need for words. How long had he—had he—liked her? Always—at least, though he had scarcely known it at first, he saw now that it had been in his heart from the first. And she? Well, it was much the same with her; but—— But what? She had scarce-

ly ever hoped he would care—she scarcely could believe, even now, that he did care. Was he sure? Then the horses had to be stopped while he assured her, holding her hand tight, that he cared so much that—that, in short, there were no words for it. And then they began the sweet cross-questioning again: the whens, the wheres, and the whys, and each verse of their poem ended with the same old refrain "I love you."

"And you never did like anyone?" he asked, putting his hand on her horse's mane with a caressing gesture that was assuredly not intended for that estimable, if hard-mouthed, animal.

"Never!" This was said very emphatically, almost too emphatically to please him. Not that he was suspicious, but we cannot conceal from our readers that there *had* been a few little flirtations—innocent

enough—but still undoubtedly flirtations —between Ella and one or two young gentlemen.

"Not Bob, though he did—— What was it that he did, darling?"

"Never mind, sir," she said, looking so saucy that Hazelhatch hated a couple of men who were walking down the road towards them.

"Not Bob?"

"Certainly not Bob; though he's very kind to me, and I shouldn't have half so much hunting if he didn't take me out sometimes. And he hates hunting, poor boy!"

"Nor George?"

"George who?" But she knew perfectly well, as her lover was aware.

"George Newsbury."

"No—I—Oh! Lord Hazelhatch—"

"Harry!"

"Well—Harry—if—perhaps if I had never seen you I might have liked him, and have done what he——" and then she stopped, feeling that even to him she had no right to reveal the secret of poor George Newsbury's heart.

"Oh, he did, did he? What impertinence!" exclaimed Hazelhatch, feeling very unjustly incensed. "I scarcely see how——"

"Oh! don't say I encouraged him, Harry! Please don't. I really didn't, for I never knew he was serious. And we laughed and talked together, and I liked him very much, and I do still; and as you wouldn't mind my liking him," she added, looking fondly into her lover's face; "but I never felt for him what I feel for you; and it hurts me very much to think that I may not have made this quite clear to him."

The gates of Castle Dorington were very near now, and the first thorn of the rose—the first parting—had to be endured.

"What will your father say?"

"I think he will be pleased, Harry. I hope he will. How can he help it?"

How could he help it, indeed? Although the Braye property was known to be heavily encumbered, the true state of things was hardly surmised; and even Mr. Bannerburn, with all his pride of pedigree, could scarcely object to an alliance with what was, after all, the leading family of his county. Besides this, he liked young Hazelhatch, and was wont to declare that there was a little more in him than in any of the other youngsters he met nowadays. He thought the reason for this was because Hazelhatch had enunciated sound views of Society to him; but in truth it was because that young gentleman—whose

horror of hurting anyone's feelings, except for necessity's sake, amounted almost to a mania—always listened with courteous patience to his diatribes, and did not turn away from boredom with that happy boorishness which so distinguishes our modern golden youth.

"How can he help liking it?"

"I don't know," said Hazelhatch, reflectively, wishing their horses did not walk so fast. "I fancy we are pretty hard up. My father hints so to me now and then, and old Graines is getting more solemn every day. But we shouldn't want very much, should we, my little Ella? They'd give us the Lodge in the Park, and we'd furnish it according to the rules of Low Art—or, at least, *not* according to the rules of what they call High Art—and have a couple of hunters a-piece. And in the summer we'd go to town, and I should

hang about in doorways, while all the men went mad about you for admiration, and all the women for spite, and repeat to you afterwards all they had said."

"Don't be silly, Harry. I don't think we'd go to London at all, and, if we did, all the admiration I should want, or should allow, sir, would be yours. But I should always want that, Harry—darling!"

They were close to the Lodge gates by this time, and it was probably for fear of the old woman who was fumbling with the gate that she said the last word in a whisper. But he heard it, and he repeated it also in a whisper, while their eyes said volumes. It is a word that should never be spoken loud; few women's, and scarcely any men's, voices are musical enough not to mar its tenderness.

"I will write to you to-morrow," he said, as they reluctantly parted, "and you will

get it next day, my love. I should like you not to tell Mr. Bannerburn till then. It seems to me that it would be nicer if I could come over, and we could tell him together. I will speak to my father, and then I shall be able to answer at once any questions Mr. Bannerburn may put to me."

"Your father!" faltered Ella, who had forgotten everything till then, in her love. "He cannot like it."

"Oh, he won't care much," said Hazelhatch, laughing, "and he would like such a pretty daughter-in-law. Violet and he are at daggers drawn. Good-bye, my darling, good-bye."

Old Crusader—who was not a first-class hack—stumbled away with impunity along the road home, surprised at the unusual absence of the "Come up!" and touch of the spur to follow. In fact, he might have

kicked one stone along for the whole seven miles that lay between Castle Dorington and Braye, or done anything short of standing on his head, without awaking any resentment on the part of his rider, for that individual was engaged in the delicious occupation of arranging his own future —confident, young, and in love.

Telling him of the glorious run they had had—"into Brabley without a check, just as hard as we could race; and the hounds beat us all, I give you my word,"—was about as useful, as far as evoking any enthusiasm from him was concerned, as telling the Ameer of Afghanistan about the London School Board would be.

"I can't make out what's come to Harry," said George Newsbury—who was staying at the house—in the smoking-room that night. "Doesn't care twopence about the best run we've ever had—doesn't even

seem to mind having lost it—(and how he managed that is a mystery !)—and now packs himself off to bed at eleven o'clock after one cigarette, and without speaking a word to anyone."

"In love, of course," said an elderly gentleman, in a dressing-gown.

"In debt, *I* should say," put in a youth, in gorgeous array. "We don't fall in love nowadays—but we do fall in debt, worse luck !"

As to the latter capability of the present generation of young men, none could have much more experience than the speaker, of whom it was currently reported that he had, not long ago, experienced considerable difficulty in purchasing the railway ticket which would enable him to travel from London to join his sixteen splendid hunters and still more splendid stud-groom at Foxborough.

"Well, I hope he won't give up hunting, whichever it is," said the M.F.H. "It's quite a pleasure to see Harry go, and I do wish he had got away with us to-day. How they did race, to be sure!"

Then they went through the run, from find to finish, and re-jumped the big fences, grown bigger still in recollection; while Hazelhatch dreamed of love, and of Ella, and fashioned himself a Paradise, in which the sun shone on, and the birds sang for, only them.

It may readily be imagined that, when, after breakfast next morning, his father, putting on an air of business, asked him to come to the study, his lordship little knew the difficulty of the task that lay before him.

He had made some inquiries out hunting the day before, as to the position of Mr. Octavius Feyler, the new owner of Stanes-

by Manor, and the information he received had been eminently satisfactory. Money seemed no object to the great City man. He owned a moor in Scotland; a large screw yacht; a magnificent new house in Kensington; he was a mighty patron of modern art; and had given £500 for an "arrangement" no bigger than a soup-plate, and about as artistic; and he was connected with ever so many essentially sound commercial schemes. He was generous, too, and had astonished Stanesby and its neighbourhood by the lavishness with which he responded to any appeal for assistance. Besides all this, Lord Lorton had actually seen Miss Feyler in a barouche, and, having been presented to that young lady, had satisfied himself that in her, at least, there was no vulgarity. As to Mr. Feyler, he was not so sure; but, after all, as he said to himself, golden vulgarity is

not much against a man in these bustling times.

The possibility of the thing had stirred in him something like earnestness, and it was almost in a solemn tone that he, after having lit a cigar, lay back in his arm-chair, and said to his son—who expected a conversation about the game, or perhaps a little complaining anent the doings of Mr. Graines,—

"Harry, my dear boy, it is time you began to think a little seriously about the future."

CHAPTER V.

LORD LORTON IS SERIOUS.

HAZELHATCH was rather startled.

"Seriously! Yes; it's a very serious subject."

"Of course, of course, my dear boy," and Lord Lorton waved his cigar in the air, as if to deprecate any philosophizing. "I assure you that your mother and I have been thinking of your future a great deal of late."

"And why 'of late'?"

"Well, you're getting on in life."

"Twenty-five next birthday."

"Not that I think a man should marry

young; as a rule, it's a bad thing. One's son treads on one's heels too closely."

"I'm sure, father," said Hazelhatch, laughing, "I never trod on your heels."

"No; but you've cut me down out hunting, my boy, and that's rather galling; though I like to see you ride, too. By the way, how *did* you come to miss that Brabley run?"

It was curious that—wandering, apparently, away from his serious subject—his lordship should have really hit upon the most serious part thereof.

"Oh! I don't know. Got the wrong side of the wood," said his son, looking rather sheepish.

"It was the very best run I ever rode," said his lordship, with much emphasis.

"Yes"—this rather sulkily. Hazelhatch was getting a little tired of hearing the praises of the run that he had missed.

"Quite the best. It is curious that the fox should——"

"But what is it you had to say to me?" interrupted Hazelhatch. "I promised to meet Graines at eleven, to see about the Lodge; he tells me the roof is in a bad way."

"Then it will have to stay so," said Lord Lorton, petulantly. "The amount that house costs me is ridiculous. I can't see why my father should have built it."

"It's false economy allowing it to go to the bad through neglect, though. Why don't you let it?"

"How could I let it, in the middle of the park? No. Besides, you forget, Harry, that's the house you are to have if you marry before I die."

The tone in which he said these words was really serious; he pitied himself so

intensely for being subject to the common fate of humanity.

"Room enough for us all here."

"My dear boy! Do you think I want to see your mother's naturally fine temper ruined by constant quarrelling with a daughter-in-law? No, no, a mile and a half will be little enough distance between us. And this brings me to what I wanted to speak to you of. What do you think of marrying—not as an institution, or in the abstract—but what do you think of taking a wife for yourself?"

"It depends who she is, father," said Hazelhatch, opening his eyes.

"Yes, I suppose that *does* matter," answered his father, as if that was quite a new view of the subject; "though there's a vast amount of similarity in women. One thing, however, they do differ in. Some are rich and some are poor."

Hazelhatch said nothing, and Lord Lorton fidgeted in his chair, feeling that he must at last plunge *in medias res*.

"Harry, do you know that I am in great difficulties?"

"I have heard you say so."

"Yes, but I fancy you have thought it the usual cry of the father. I remember my father always talked at breakfast of ending his days in the workhouse, and after dinner he'd have given me a cheque for a few thousands with a smile. But in my case it is not the usual formula. It is quite real. I really do not know where to turn for ready money. The London butcher is actually suing for several hundreds; there's heaven knows how much due for groceries. Fancy thousands of pounds' worth of pickles and Harvey's sauce! Graines declares the property owes him two thousand, and that the Bank at

Foxborough won't advance another penny, and there's a very heavy arrear of wages due to the servants. Altogether, I'm in rather a hobble, you see, and I want you to help me."

"I had no idea it was so bad as this," exclaimed Hazelhatch, jumping up, and standing with his back to the fire.

"No, I'm not the man to complain," said the old lord, with a vague sort of self-respect; "and I can bear a good deal. But the fact is, my dear boy, that it is almost impossible to carry on much longer. They say I can't raise another sixpence on mortgage. Gad! I believe my lawyers are in a plot against me; and even old Ben Hart, to whom I wrote the other day, is shy of doing my paper at twenty per cent. The old thief!"

"Then we are ruined!" ejaculated the son, looking very pale and stern.

"Ruined! Well, that's a relative term," said the father, whose gaiety was returning, now that he had made a clean breast of it. "I've known men ruined and much richer for it. And you are never really ruined as long as you refuse to own it. Like the British soldier, we should never know when we are beaten."

Hazelhatch thought of their mode of life; of their servants, and horses, and carriages; of the dinners and balls in London; of the opera-box; of his father's racehorses and bets; and he felt very angry. Yet he spoke gently enough.

"I wish you had told me of all this before."

"*Cui bono?* I have hinted to you that we were not rolling in wealth, but of course you didn't understand me. Now you see that there is only one thing to be done."

"Yes, of course. You must sell the horses, get rid of most of the servants, sell the house in Grosvenor Square, and—well, perhaps a few years abroad might do wonders. You may depend upon me, father. *I* don't mind giving up things, and it's no virtue, for I don't care very much for what they call pleasures. And my mother will do exactly as you wish, and do it without a word. It will be hard on Violet, but that can't be helped. I am so glad you have told me, even though so late, and I long to begin putting things straight."

Lord Lorton burst out laughing.

"'Gad, Harry! you're as heroic in your remedies as the good young man in a religious novel; and you know about as much of the world as the religious novelist. If you are walking along a narrow path with a precipice on one side, you don't

jump over to avoid the danger of tumbling over."

"But if this is the only way to avert ruin——"

"Why, it is ruin itself."

"But, sir——"

"My dear Harry, don't let me hear any more of such folly. I told you I wanted to talk seriously, and here you are making jokes about selling things, and living at Boulogne."

"I never said anything about Boulogne."

"Well, Brussels, then; where I might play whist for centimes, and occasionally see a bad French play shockingly acted; or sit on a chair in the park, after dining at a cheap restaurant, and enjoy the odour of Belgian tobacco and Belgian garlic. No. Let us be serious."

"I'm quite ready to be serious," said Hazelhatch, biting his lip.

"It's very easy for some people to be serious," observed Lord Lorton, glancing uneasily at him. "I daresay it's a want of the sense of humour."

"Perhaps. At all events, I can see no humour in what you have just told me."

"Yet the situation has its humorous side. And, after all, the remedy is so simple."

"And the remedy is——"

"You are rather dull this morning, Harry. Why, of course, you must put things straight by marrying an heiress."

"I!"

"Well—yes, you. You see *I* can't, being already married; and your sister, even if she marry as she is intended to, can do but little good. It's bad form borrowing from your son-in-law."

"But, father, even supposing that I could for a moment dream of consenting

to such a thing—even supposing it were possible—that the heiress you speak of were all ready with her money in her hand, ready to transfer it with the hand (and the heart, of course) to me, how are your difficulties to be met in the meantime? These things are scarcely arranged in a few weeks."

"Oh! things have been as bad as this before," said his lordship, rather forgetting his part. "Something always turns up. I daresay I shall be able to screw something out of Graines after all; and at the worst I can sell the house in town. But I want you to look matters in the face, my boy. There is no use in putting that off any longer."

"No, indeed!" murmured Hazelhatch, with an involuntary sneer.

"You see the position. The family is done for without assistance. It was in

about the same position in the time of your great-grandfather. He is one of my earliest recollections. A very fine-looking man, with a grand air. Hated children, and ordered me out of the room because I snuffled. He was luckily unmarried when he discovered the emptiness of his coffers, and he at once sent for the best merchant's daughter to be had in the market, and put things straight. You see they're gone crooked again, and now it's your turn to do the same. I hope I have made myself clear, and that you understand me, Harry?"

"Yes; I understand you."

"That's right. Your mother and I are very anxious on the subject, and she can tell you of something that may interest you. Will you talk it over with her?"

"Look here, father," said Hazelhatch, looking prodigiously tall as he stood in

front of the old lord's chair; "do you know what I think of your proposal?"

"I hope you look at it from a right point of view."

"I hope I do—I trust I do; and I hope I shall never forget the respect I owe you as my father. But I think your proposal is mean and disgusting."

"Harry!"

"Yes; I must say it. Because—it matters little how—because we, the Braye family, choose to think we cannot give up our luxuries—luxuries the very enjoyment of which now is swindling—some unfortunate girl is to be bought, or entrapped into being an unloved wife; a convenience to the glory of the house of Lorton. It is a shameful bargain that you propose, and I will be no party to it."

"You speak warmly, my dear boy, and I don't mind it; warmth should go with

youth—'When first I met thee, warm and young,' you know. But don't run away with wrong notions of my meaning. You talk like a three-volume moralist, who probably would sell all his principles in a lump for five pounds. I assume that you have got into no entanglement—of a matrimonial nature, I mean. All I ask is that in looking at young women you should remember that it won't do—it won't be fair on either party—for you to fall in love with a girl without money. I don't suppose you will assert that no heiress could be worthy of your love?"

"Of course not; but——"

"Well, there you concede everything. I should like to see you married and happy. I think I should be very fond of my grandchildren. And if it could be, Harry, that you took to your home some one who had it in her power to set the old

family on its legs again, I should die a happy man."

The thought of his death made his voice shake; and Lord Hazelhatch was touched.

"Perhaps I jumped rather hastily to a conclusion—but—— I wish it were possible, but——"

"You surely have no entanglement?" said Lord Lorton, looking intently at him.

"I don't like the word entanglement. If you mean to ask whether I have seen a woman I should like to make my wife, yes, I have."

"And may I know the lady's name?"

"Well, no. I think, under the circumstances, that would be scarcely fair. Of course, I had no idea of our position till this morning. Had I known it a few days ago, I——"

"It is of recent occurrence then? Ah! Well, I leave it to your common sense

whether you are free to marry without money. There is no one so poor as a poor 'man of position,' as they call us. At all events, I have done my duty in telling you the state of the case."

Then, lighting from the butt-end of his smoked cigar a fresh one that must have cost at least a shilling—or perhaps eighteenpence at credit price—his lordship sauntered from the room and proceeded to go through the horses, a duty which no non-hunting day ever saw unfulfilled.

And Hazelhatch stood where his father left him, with very bitter thoughts for companions. The dream that had made the last few hours so happy was dispelled at a blow. How cruel was it of Fate to open his eyes—and hers—to what love could be, only that they might know what hopeless love was!

Perhaps, he hoped, she did not really

care as he did. If she did—— Well, was there not work to do, money to earn, for him as well as for others? Was his title and "position" to bind him down for life as a pauper, as an impostor, or as a pensioner on the bounty of a rich wife or father-in-law!—a thousand times no! He loved her too well to give her up—indeed, it was but his duty not to give her up without allowing her to make her choice, after she knew. He would ride over to Castle Dorington at once and tell her, and then she would have as long as she liked to make her choice. She should consult her father if she pleased, and by her decision he would be bound.

His father saw him canter past the house an hour afterwards, and turned to Lady Lorton.

"As you value your life—or rather my pocket—my dear, not a word, not a whisper

to Harry about the Feylers. Let him meet them by accident. Miss Feyler is a girl that no man could help admiring, money or no money. And take care never to say a word against Ella Bannerburn before him. I think he has gone to Castle Dorington now. Never try to blow out a fire."

From which remark we may gather that his lordship was a man of some discernment.

CHAPTER VI.

"BUT SHE'S A FLIRT!"

UNLIKE Braye House, which stood in the centre of a large park, Castle Dorington was but seventy yards from the high-road; and it was from the market-place of the village of Coalbridge that you got the best view of the queer old building, with its unexpected turns and twists; its picturesque gables and carved windows; its air of ancientness, and perhaps of gradual decay.

The wrought-iron gates through which you passed to enter the straight avenue of magnificent limes which led up to the

front door had the date of the seventeenth century upon them; and, if the old servant who opened that front door had been similarly labelled, you would scarcely have been surprised, so venerable and so thoroughly in keeping with the place where he had passed his life did he seem.

A gigantic rookery cawed above your head as you walked up—a rookery never profaned by the crack of pea-rifle, for Mr. Bannerburn held all living animals sacred, having probably, in his hunting days, adopted the comfortable theory that the fox enjoyed the fun of the thing.

And here may we be permitted to digress for a moment to remark the strange notion entertained by most non-hunting men, and by all "outsider" critics of hunting, that those pursuing the fox are all thirsting for his blood. It is true that when a fox refuses to face the open, and keeps you

shivering for an hour in a keen wind, perhaps on a hunter that has not learned how to stand still, the sound of "Who-hoop," in the covert causes you to exclaim, "The brute only deserved to be killed,"—but when a gallant fox has broken within reasonable time, and taken you a dance across the country, he cannot himself be more anxious to save his brush than are those prudent sportsmen who wish to see him repeat his feat many times ere he die.

To return to Castle Dorington.

Miss Ella was, of course, at home when our lover called—"The Honourable Ella," as the old servant, who fully shared all his master's beliefs, called her—and in a moment Hazelhatch was holding both her hands and looking into her dark eyes.

"I haven't come to see your father," he

said, after a few unreportable preliminaries.

"No?" she said, merrily. "Then I wonder whom you have come to see!" (She said "*who* you have come to see," but the fear of the critics forces us to correct her grammar.) He was very serious.

"I mean I haven't come to speak to him. I want that put off for a little; and I want to tell you something, dear. We are very poor."

Ella's idea of the Braye poverty was much the same as Hazelhatch's had been before his father spoke to him. She scarcely saw the need of the serious tone.

"What do I care for that, Harry?"

"You must care. I care very much. His lordship spoke to me this morning, and I find it's far worse than I ever dreamed. We are far poorer than—than Mr. Graines, for instance."

"Than Mr. Graines! Why, he is your agent."

"Yes—but it is really so. My father has been living upon borrowed money ever so long. I don't think I have the right to ask any girl to be my wife."

She looked up into his face, and took her hand from his.

"You surely do not feel—bound?"

"Yes—but let me finish my sentence. I feel bound because I love you. Don't say what is on your lips. I know it beforehand. But, darling, I want you to understand clearly how we stand. I am no worse off than many other fellows of my age, except that I am called by courtesy a lord, and being called a lord won't prevent my working."

"Your working?"

"Yes; do you think me so frivolous—so——"

"Harry, you know I do not! But it seems so strange. I scarcely know what to say."

"Take time to think."

The coldness in his voice hurt her. She turned round quickly with a proud gesture.

"Do you—can you—believe that your money is a moment in my mind—as far as *I* am concerned, I mean? Do you believe I love you because you are called a lord?"

There was an inflection of sarcasm in her tone as she repeated his words that he had never heard before.

But as he rode along he had settled what to say, and he said it bravely—

"Ella dear, you are all the world to me. When my father told me this to-day he seemed to be cutting all the pleasure out of my life. I had hoped to make you so happy—to be so happy myself in doing so!

But now it would be a struggle—a very hard one, for I have been brought up as a rich man, and I am weak in many ways. We should have to wait. A modern poet has said, 'A man may work, a maiden sure may wait;' but it is far easier to work than to wait. Working fills life, waiting makes it empty. And time doesn't stand still. The best part of life goes very quick. Think of what you might be with George Newsbury, for instance, and think of what you would be with nothing but the hope of my getting that vague thing, 'an appointment.' Then there will have to be what I know you detest—secrecy. I am not going to have you join the miserable list of girls with lovers who can't marry them —*won't*, the good-natured world always says. Don't shake your head. There are other good reasons besides. What do you think your father would say, if I came to him

and remarked, 'I want to be engaged to your daughter, and prevent her marrying anyone else; but when I shall be able to marry her myself is very doubtful'? Can you doubt what he would say, and rightly say? No, darling, I want you to look things in the face, and think it all over, and then write to me. You do not, you cannot doubt my love! If you love me you must believe I speak the truth when I say that it is only for your own sake I want you to pause."

"I want no time to think, Harry," she cried, putting her hand into his again. "If you do really want me I will wait as long as you please. I will do what you wish, for I love you! But for that very love's sake I could give you up, if it were better for you; and perhaps it would be, Harry. Don't you sometimes think to yourself, 'I wish we had never met'?"

But he evaded the question.

"It seems hard," he said, gloomily. "I was so happy yesterday, and I thought of nothing but to make you happy; and now——"

"Who knows," said the girl, as she looked tenderly into his face—"who knows what may come? We are young, and we love one another. Oh! that I had a fortune to give you, my darling!"

"I am glad you have not."

"Glad?"

"Yes. When a man marries a rich woman, let him love her as he will, it is always a sort of insult."

"Why? It is no insult to a girl to marry a rich man. If you had been rich I should not have thought you insulted me, Harry."

"It would have been quite different, dearest."

"Tell me how?"

Whether Hazelhatch would have been able to prove his aphorism we cannot say, for at this moment Mr. Bannerburn entered, and their conversation came to an end. The poor lover was in no mood to enter into any of the discussions the owner of Castle Dorington loved to provoke (for he was somewhat fond of the sound of his own voice), and soon left, pleading business at home.

But before he got upon his horse he found time to whisper to Ella that he expected to hear from her and should not consider she had decided till he received the letter.

So he was not surprised by next morning's post to get one in that young lady's bold, clear handwriting. It was undated, and ran thus:—

"DEAREST HARRY,

"I have decided—had decided, as you know, when we parted yesterday. The great difficulty to me will be the secrecy; but I could bear anything for your love. It will be bad for you, darling: I feel that; and, if they all find it out, I know you will be blamed. May I not bear all the blame? It is all mine, yet I cannot help it, oh! my love, for I love you so! It can scarcely be wicked—I mean such obstacles as these could not have been intended by heaven to stand between love like ours; and, when the time I shall pray for every night arrives, the very waiting will make the fulfilment of our longing the more joyous. It will be hard to meet you as a mere acquaintance, but I suppose I must. Opportunities will surely come now and then for us to be alone together. I will be so patient, Harry; and do not doubt

that if it be bad for you—if it interfere with your prospects—I will be brave enough to bear its ending altogether. I *long* to see you again. Perhaps I shall be out hunting at Stone Bridge.

"Ever your own loving

"ELLA."

As Harry Hazelhatch placed this letter—his dearest possession—in his desk, he vowed that she should not require the bravery of which she spoke; that he had now before him an aim and object which would make life's difficulties as nothing in the overcoming; and that, come what might, he would always be true to the dark-eyed girl who loved him so fondly.

At dinner that night he happened to sit next an especial crony of his, a certain Miss Newsbury, maiden aunt of the M.F.H., who lived in a little house called Grove

Cottage, just outside the town of Foxborough. She was noted chiefly for her good little dinners, and her good little stories—of her neighbours. And she might have also been noted for an ugliness so transcendent that it was almost another quality. But her gowns came from Paris—as some of her tales, when not of Foxshire, did also—and *Worth* covers a multitude of sins.

That she was a gossip, all agreed. A good-natured one, those said who had not heard of her remarks concerning themselves. And she lied away characters with so much tact, and in such a jolly, cheery way, that really it almost seemed as if she were doing her victims a service; as if she *could* have said it all in a so much more disagreeable manner, had she chosen. With young men she was especially popular, for with them she went in for calling

a spade a spade, and would—if certain no women could hear her—tell them stories quite as spicy as anything they could hear in a club smoking-room on a Sunday. She had a knack of scolding them which left nothing of the scolding as an after-taste, but only a sense of having been—not exactly flattered,—for no one likes being flattered!—but of having had even one's wicked side appreciated and admired by a judge striving to condemn.

"You really mustn't go on like that with poor little Mrs. A," she would say to a young man, who was very doubtful whether Mrs. A didn't think him a bore, when he sat and drawled out his common-places in her drawing-room at tea-time. "It's doing her a deal of harm, and everyone is talking. You naughty boy, you really shouldn't."

And probably Mrs. A, the next time the "naughty boy" called, thought him a

greater nuisance than ever, his native stupidity being supplemented by an air of conquest still more unendurable.

Hazelhatch, who did not trouble himself much to read character, thought her a good-natured, rather amusing busybody, whose occasional bitterness of tongue was amply atoned for by her kindness of heart; for Miss Newsbury took good care that any little act of generosity she did—out of an ample income—should be noised speedily abroad.

Miss Newsbury—who was accustomed to whisper to her friends that the Braye family could not possibly last another year —"quite on their last legs, I am told; they say old Lorton has sold all the gold plate, and that he tried to get the diamonds one night, but Lady Lorton sat upon the box and defied him"—affected an extreme partiality for Lord Hazelhatch,

and managed to amuse him prodigiously.

But at this dinner-party she was not quite so successful as usual.

"What a pity it is," she said, casually, after a brilliant bit of character-destroying, "that that nice-looking girl, Ella Bannerburn, 'the Honourable Ella,' as they call her, makes herself so very conspicuous. Not that I believe half they say of her. She's a great deal too clever to compromise herself. But there's no doubt she has been after poor George in the most audacious manner."

"Nothing more untrue was ever said," cried Hazelhatch, hotly.

Miss Newsbury glanced at him with a smile.

"Well, all I know is that George is perfectly wretched; and certainly it seemed to lookers-on that she was very—very free with him once."

"Never," said his lordship, curtly.

"And poor Bob Manisty—the boy's quite mad about her."

"Bob Manisty is a schoolboy."

"Yes; she doesn't respect the tenderest age. I even believe the rector is rather hit. But are *you* one of the victims too?"

"Ella Bannerburn is a charming girl, and it is quite easy to understand why nearly every man that sees her likes her. She hasn't a bad thought in her, and never could imagine bad thoughts of others."

"But she's a flirt, Lord Hazelhatch."

"She likes laughing and talking, but I don't believe she has ever flirted in her life."

"Not with poor George?"

"Not with poor George, as you call him."

"Nor with your lordship?"

"I don't believe El—Miss Bannerburn

—knows how to flirt," he said, parrying the question.

"*Nascitur non fit*," said Miss Newsbury, who always made George translate any quotation she met with in her newspapers. "I don't blame a girl for flirting any more than I blame her for having a snub nose or a big foot—it is not her fault."

The withdrawal of the ladies stopped the repartee that rose to his mouth, and he vowed that the old woman's words were nothing to him.

But there was just enough truth in them to rankle; and he found himself next morning, even as the hounds streamed along the Hayleford pastures, carrying a burning scent, while he had no one within half a field of him, repeating to himself that sentence of Miss Newsbury's, "But she's a flirt."

It was as the hounds were drawing the

second covert that day that Lord Lorton approached him, riding by the side of a young lady on a magnificent bay horse, and said, in his most agreeable manner,

"As you have begun hunting in earnest, you ought to know my son, who is, I think, our hardest rider, though I say it that shouldn't. Harry, my boy, I want to present you to Miss Feyler."

CHAPTER VII.

THE VISIT TO STANESBY MANOR.

BEFORE the introduction in the hunting-field took place, Lady Lorton had paid her important visit to Stanesby Manor, and had returned much impressed with the looks and manners of the heiress, and a little disgusted with the self-assertion and *loudness* of her father.

Mr. Octavius Feyler was what is generally called "a self-made man." And it must be confessed that, putting aside the fortune—which is what people really meant he had made—he had done his manufacturing uncommonly badly. Not

to outward seeming, however, for he was a portly, fresh-coloured, gentlemanlike-looking man enough; and, moreover, he had—by careful watching of others—acquired a certain grand air that quite impressed those who did not know him. Even fastidious persons had been known to talk to him for ten minutes at a club or party, and speak of him afterwards as having very good manners. But no one who had been to his house and had seen him with the varnish off—and it was a very thin coating—did so speak of him. Indeed, unless they wanted to get something from him, they were accustomed to say very hard things about his arrogant vulgarity and purse pride. But then the number of people who expect to get nothing from a millionaire with an only daughter is small; so Mr. Feyler found his circle of friends increasing every day.

He had committed that very common fault of rising men—married before he had ceased to rise—and Mrs. Feyler had been for some time rather a weight to carry up. True that his use of the letter H was far from perfect, *her* obstinate misplacing of that aspirate was quite exceptional; and he often groaned as he recognized that the doors of the "gilded saloons of the aristocracy," as Mr. Goldwin Smith calls them, would never be thrown open to himself and his wonderfully educated daughter as long as they were encumbered with this H-less companion.

But Providence stepped in to the rescue, and removed the poor lady to a place where, perhaps, pronunciation is unimportant and vulgarity does not count; and then Mr. Feyler made his big plunge, bought a mansion in Kensington, a seat in Parliament, and the Stanesby estate in

Foxshire, and made up his mind to force a way into the heart of "the very best society."

He and his daughter, Miss Evelyn, happened to be standing at a window when the Lorton carriage swept by on its way to the front door.

"It's Lady Lorton, papa!" exclaimed the girl.

"More likely his lordship—that'd be the etiquette."

"No; I saw her bonnet. But she's only come to leave a card."

"Ha!" said Mr. Feyler, ringing a bell. "Thomas, if that is the Countess of Lorton at the door, tell Mr. Jenks to tell her ladyship that Miss Feyler is at home, and hopes she will step in. I'll just be off and come in again in a few moments accidentally. Etiquette's humbug; I don't see why the old woman should drive all this

way for nothing, and I want her to see you, my dear." And, casting an admiring glance at his daughter's handsome face, he quitted the room.

Lady Lorton was not much more stringent in matters of etiquette than the merchant prince, and alighted from her carriage at once on receiving the message from Mr. Jenks, the butler.

She was blessed with as much curiosity as most women, and was very anxious to see this heiress who was destined to repair the fortunes of the Braye family. Such an opportunity would probably not occur again for some time, as she was unaccompanied by her daughter, Lady Violet, who was accustomed to repress her mother's zeal for information, and to insist on bringing a visit to a termination just as she was in the midst of some delicious piece of county gossip.

Lady Violet was a young lady with much *character*—as selfishness is so often called—and rarely did anything she did not like, though the one thing she would have liked most—marriage—failed to come to her; perhaps because of the determination and exercise of her character with which she pursued it.

"I am very glad to make your acquaintance, Miss Feyler," said Lady Lorton, holding out a fat gloved hand, and wondering why it was the girl looked so ladylike, so very different from what a Miss Feyler ought to have been.

"It is very good of you to call, and to come in without ceremony. James, will you let Mr. Feyler know that Lady Lorton is here? Papa is in the house, I think."

And James retired to consult Thomas on the reason why masters and mistresses took the trouble to be so deceitful.

But papa thought that it would be as well for the two ladies to get a little accustomed to each other before he entered, for he knew instinctively that he could not behave—"do the trick," he called it—as his daughter could, and he was very anxious to ensure the friendship of Lady Lorton.

And Evelyn Feyler was quite successful; there was no *gaucherie*, while there was no forwardness, about her. She was a well-educated, self-possessed, handsome girl, who, as Lady Lorton said to herself, might have been anyone, and who certainly would compare most favourably with Lady Violet.

"I suppose you know a good many people in the county?" said her ladyship.

"Oh, no; very few indeed. You see, we are quite new people, Lady Lorton; and, although new people are tolerated in

the bustle of London, in the country it is very different."

"New people are not all the same," said the old lady, wagging her head with some archness as she looked at the well-shaped little head with its coil of natural auburn hair.

"No, not *quite* the same," assented the girl, wondering where Lady Lorton had bought such a preposterous bonnet. "Of course papa is in a different position from some. Being a member of Parliament is something; and—and you don't think there is anything for a man to be ashamed of in having created his own fortunes, Lady Lorton?"

"Oh dear, no—on the contrary. What would England be without men like your father, Miss Feyler? Oh, no—I am *very* glad I found you at home, for I wanted particularly that there should be no diffi-

culty about your making acquaintance with us all in Foxshire. You must come and dine and sleep next week."

"I am sure papa will be delighted."

"And you?"

"Oh, I'm very fond of going out, and seeing people and things. Though I'm very fond of home too," she added, with some wisdom, feeling that such a sentiment should please the wearer of such a bonnet.

"Young people should always be fond of home," said Lady Lorton, emphatically. "I can't bear girls that think of nothing but gadding from place to place, and keep all their smiles and pleasantness for strangers, leaving nothing but grumbling and ill-humour for their own family."

Lady Lorton would have been astonished to be told that her hearer knew she was thinking of Lady Violet, for she scarcely knew it herself.

"I'm not one of those, I hope," said Evelyn, smiling. "At least, I'm already fond of this dear old place; only I wish one could keep oneself from thinking of the pang it must have been to the owner to sell it. That's the worst of us new people—we can't help displacing old people, you see."

Lady Lorton was just about again to forgive the Feylers for being "new people," when the master of the house, having put on a very smart blue frock-coat, and a pair of excruciating patent-leather boots, appeared, and bade her welcome in his grandest manner.

"I didn't interrupt you before, because, as your ladyship knows, two is company, and three is none. I hope Evelyn has offered you some refreshment."

"No, none, thanks. Lord Lorton would have accompanied me, but that he had

business to-day;"—the business being a meet at Puncherton—"we hope you will like Foxshire, Mr. Feyler."

"Oh, yes, my lady, and *we* hope Foxshire will like us. The old ideas of county pride are dying out fast now. New blood's the thing—new blood—and money!"

"Exactly," said Lady Lorton, a little frightened, "exactly. I was asking Miss Feyler whether you would be able to come over to Braye, and dine and sleep, on Thursday. The hounds meet close by next day. There will be no party, only a few county people."

"Delighted, Countess. I don't hunt myself, but Evelyn does, and rides capitally. I've got her two as fine hunters as could be bought for money; and she does me credit, Lady Lorton."

"I am told you sing," said her ladyship, turning to Evelyn.

"Yes; I sing a little."

"I don't know what you call a little, Evelyn. I can assure your ladyship that few hamateurs can hold a candle to her. Few of 'em have had such advantages. What was the name of your best master, Evelyn—the tremendous big swell?"

"Papa knows very little about it," said the girl, smiling very good-temperedly, while she could have boxed his ears; "and thinks a good master must make a good singer."

"You must let us be the judge, Miss Feyler, and bring your music with you. And now, I think, I will ask for my carriage."

"I really must insist on your ladyship having some refreshment first," said the millionaire, with a jaunty courtesy that was almost insulting.

"No; nothing, thank you."

"And I cannot let you go without seeing the house."

"My dear papa," said Evelyn, "probably Lady Lorton has often seen the house before."

"Ah, yes; but not since I furnished it. At any rate, your ladyship must just have a peep at the picture-gallery. For a small private collection of modern paintings it is generally considered unique. James, the Countess's carriage. I go in for modern painters, milady, out of charity."

"Indeed!" said Lady Lorton, feeling that she was expected to say something.

"Yes," he rejoined, throwing open a door which led to the gallery in question. "Yes; for no amount of money can do any good to an old master in his grave; while, by encouraging young and rising painters, we fulfil one of the duties of—of the position I have the honour of holding."

"Certainly," said she, looking through her eye-glass at a very highly-coloured portrait of an old lady in a plum-coloured velvet gown.

"That's Mrs. Feyler—rather a vulgar picture—but one runs that risk in employing young artists. They haven't, all of them, the gentility required for portraits. Now, there's a fine piece, my lady—'Baby Cutting his First Tooth.' The painting of the nurse's apron is considered masterly. A little more this way, and you get the light on it. Look at the painting of the coral—splendid! That man will make his mark, Lady Lorton! I've given him an order for a companion picture; and shall pay three hundred guineas for it. It is 'The First Fall'—the same child, grown older, after tumbling down. The realism of the barked knee, with the scratches and blood, is to be tremendous. Ah, Lady

Lorton, what these artists would do without us capitalists to help 'em is a mystery! If you—as a member of the aristocracy—will forgive me for saying so, the patronage of art has come to US now; and the old patrons, lords and baronets, and such like, just content themselves with admiring the works WE buy—which I may almost say WE create; for without US they would not exist."

Poor Lady Lorton, alarmed by his emphatic manner and loud voice, sank helplessly into a chair, and listened. Mr. Feyler, with a countess as audience, surpassed himself; and Evelyn, talking to a young man who had just entered the drawing-room, was not at hand to check him.

"Did it ever strike you, Lady Lorton, how very powerful men like myself are becoming? I daresay not—yet it is plain enough to see; but you aristocrats—pres-

ent company excepted, of course—wrap yourselves in your dignity, and drive down to the Co-operative Stores to save eighteenpence on your Harvey's sauce; while we—whom you look down upon—keep up the credit of the higher classes."

"Yes, of course, Mr. Feyler. If my carriage——"

"One moment, Lady Lorton. Just look at Society. Who give the best balls and parties, who drive the best carriages, who wear the best clothes, who supply the beauties that you all run after? Why, my class! Without us London Society would cease to be, or would come down to a hole-and-corner meetin' of lords without enough money to gild their coronets. And as to country society! Your ladyship is good enough to call on us, but I know what being kept out in the cold is. Yet how do we really stand? Look at the 'ead-

quarters of 'unting—as they call Leicestershire—what do you find? Is it the swells, as they call themselves, that keep the hounds, have the best studs, and ride the hardest? Not a bit of it. If you see a good man, going well on a good 'orse, you may lay two to one he's a City man; and your soap-boiler's son, or your young stock-broker, can put on his breeches and boots, and ride to hounds just like a lord. It's——"

"Really, Mr. Feyler," exclaimed the little old lady, with a touch of dignity she seldom assumed, "I am anxious to go home, and must request you to ask whether my carriage is round."

Even Mr. Feyler could scarcely disregard this, and he unwillingly suffered his victim to escape into the drawing-room, where she took leave of Evelyn, and somewhat hastily departed.

"What did you think of them?" asked Lord Lorton that evening.

"She is charming; but the man—oh! Lorton, he is quite terrible; an iconoclast, or whatever they call it."

"An advanced Radical. Why, he's bound to be vulgar and self-asserting. If the girl is charming, that is all we need care for."

"But I'll never call there again alone," said her ladyship.

"You're very aristocratic," said the young man in the drawing-room, with a sneer, as Mr. Feyler returned from escorting his guest to her carriage.

"Why the devil couldn't you keep out of the way, Granville?" said the other, angrily; "you knew she was here."

"And why shouldn't Lady Lorton see Granville?" asked Evelyn, with a flush on her face that made it even handsomer.

"Oh, because I'm a snob, Evelyn!" said Mr. Granville Hereward, carelessly.

"A snob!—then what are we all? In what way are you better than Granville, papa?"

"Richer," put in Mr. Hereward, curtly.

"My position—" began Mr. Feyler, with pomposity that was not quite assured.

"Oh, bother your position, papa!" cried the girl, snapping her fingers. "Keep all that for people who can take it in. *I* can't. And, as to Granville, all I can say is that, if people snub him, they shall not see me, so you may make the best of that."

But father and daughter had a few words together later in the day, when the young man was not present, which ended by her saying,

"Of course I know what I'm about—and Granville and I understand one another perfectly. You don't suppose I

should make a fool of myself for him or anyone else? But I must see this paragon of a viscount. Suppose he squints, or has a hump on his back!"

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS NEWSBURY GIVES GEORGE A HINT.

"WHERE there's a will there's a way." And it must not be supposed that, notwithstanding the great Feyler plot, our lovers did not find many opportunities of billing and cooing to their hearts' content. A vein of sadness that ran through their love-making did not serve to make that love-making any the less tender; and the consciousness that they were liable at any moment to be discovered vested each "good-bye" with the sad but sweet importance of a last one. It was a life of excitement; of whispering

and troubled glances; of coy hand pressures and of snatched kisses: how far pleasanter than the more legitimate existence of an engaged couple only those who have been giggled and stared at, and chaffed and condoled with while in that purgatory, can appreciate.

One sharp pair of eyes had fathomed their secret, carefully as they guarded it, and that pair of eyes belonged, unfortunately, to a very sharp possessor. Miss Newsbury was one of those women who, never pretty enough to be made love to, cherish the idea that, if any male person *had* made love to them, he would have been enchained for ever by the wealth of capability for loving he would have found; drowned, as it were, in the flood of amorousness he would have let loose. And she had her revenge on Society for its neglect, in the sportive malignity with which she

hunted an innocent love affair from find to finish, and who-hooped over its kill in the open. Although people admired her lovely dresses and her well-cooked little dinners, with cleverly-chosen guests to eat them, and laughed at her waspish stories —so amusing when the sting goes into your neighbours—she was scarcely what you could call popular. She was "a woman of the world;" and "a woman of the world" has no enemies—only all her friends hate her. But, both at Grove Cottage in Foxshire, and in her little house in that part of Pimlico that people who live there like to call Belgravia, she was a power; and, unlike most despots, she knew how to keep her supremacy by making moderate use thereof.

One of her chief amusements was to set up as the intimate friend of a young couple; listen to, and increase the reason

for, the complaints of each against the other; hint to the wife that she should do a little fashionable flirting, and to the husband that he must not be *too* marital; and, if the end towards which her efforts tended came, who could more amusingly describe all the causes that had led to the effect which gave "Society" subject for exciting converse?

"Miss Newsbury said she saw it all along. He used to come home drunk and beat her, and, poor thing! she often escaped to Miss Newsbury's house; and then, one day, Captain Sparkes, a great friend of Miss Newsbury, found her crying —and——" &c., &c., &c.

Or else—

"Oh, yes; Miss Newsbury did all she could to stop it; but it was hopeless. First she took to painting, then to drinking, and then he asked Miss Newsbury to

interfere; but Miss Newsbury says she was quite heartless and depraved, tried to poison him more than once—Miss Newsbury knew the doctor who came with the stomach-pump—and at last she went off with——" &c.

It was but natural that the Captain Sparkes's—who often had wives of their own, by-the-by—should like a lady in whose house they might haply find other men's wives weeping for hatred of their husbands; and this in itself gave Miss Newsbury a vast amount of popularity with young men who aimed at being Don Juans in stick-up collars.

Had Miss Newsbury's position in life been different, there is little doubt but that she might have amassed a large fortune by following a profession which only requires tact and the wish to give pleasure to others.

Our young men of the day, if they, as Englishmen, take their pleasures sadly, like to take them with as little trouble as possible; and even in love affairs an intermediary saves a deal of trouble.

The one person Miss Newsbury really cared for was her nephew George; and she divided her winter pretty equally between her own cottage and his house at Averley, where she did the honours, with much grace and ingenuity, on the occasion of his giving a party not altogether composed of men. In the summer George found her drawing-room in town a most convenient place in which to meet those ladies who pleased him, and the little dinners and suppers she got up for his especial benefit were always successful. George was very good-looking and amiable, and had so sweet a knack of dressing

himself that few youths could easily keep themselves from imitation of his original devices. It was he who revived the Noah's ark coat, which, laughed at by Leech in his inimitable sketches some fifteen years ago, has suddenly returned to beautify our fashionable thoroughfares. He had seven buttons on his coat in front, the top one almost touching his chin, and a fresh pair of trousers for each day in the year. His ties went twice round his neck, and his collars overlapped in front. No one could suck the head of his cane—which he always of course took out with him in the evening, it being so useful at a theatre—with more negligent grace; his gloves had three buttons; his hat glistened with oil. Add to this that he could ride and shoot decently, managed to read the news of the day, and had once been known to tackle—as he called it—a French novel which was

reported to be naughtier than usual, and you have the sum of his attainments. His friends thought him a very good fellow, and so no doubt he was; he never would have coveted his friend's, whatever he may have done to his neighbour's, wife; he never told a lie except to a woman; and his spirits were always good. What more could be required of a young man blessed with ten thousand a year, a nice place in Foxshire, and comfortable rooms in the Albany?

His aunt—although she enjoyed being seen talking to a clever man if he was celebrated, liked better to be in contact with those who believed in her—was very fond of him, and had set her heart on his making a grand match. So that her anger against Ella for not being struck by his charms was solely for that reason. Had the girl returned his affection she would

have hated her still more, and taken very strong measures against her; but that she should seem so utterly to despise the pretensions of her handsome, well-dressed nephew—who was, as his mother had once observed of him, quite as much at home in a duchess's boudoir as in his club—was unendurable. The Newsburys, although not exactly new people, only belonged by courtesy to the real old Foxshire stock—the Bannerburns and Brayes, the Stanesbys and Atterworths—and it behoved George to hold his head high, and never suffer any advantage to be taken of him in his own county. Although a marriage with Ella Bannerburn would be bad, a flirtation with her, thought his aunt, would be rather good than otherwise. People might laugh a good deal at Thomas de Longueville, eighteenth Lord Dorington, and the Honourable Ella, but there

was a general feeling of respect for his race throughout the county; and it was besides generally understood that the owner of Castle Dorington never admitted any but those he considered gentlemen *pur sang* within his walls; so that to stay there—and Miss Ella's invitation sufficed—was to some extent a distinction. In addition to this, George Newsbury's hopeless love did not make him a pleasanter companion; and Miss Newsbury loathed melancholy more than all the vices put together.

"You should give it up, George," she said to him, as he sat in her drawing-room one Sunday, a day he frequently devoted to her. "I grant you that her conduct in flirting with you while carrying on with Lord Hazelhatch is indefensible. And, if you are so angry with her, I can't see why you can't give it up. A little neglect on your part would do wonders."

"I don't think so, Aunt Polly," said the young man, pulling his moustache dejectedly. "I fancy she's hit there, and hit hard. Confound him!"

"Oh, you needn't confound him. He'll be confounded—as far as this is concerned—soon enough. The idea of *his* thinking of marrying for love! Why, my dear George, unless he marries money, it's my belief he'll be a pauper. Old Lorty is borrowing as fast as he can, and when he dies there'll be an end to everything—if, indeed, it lasts so long."

"She isn't the sort of girl to care for money."

"I'm not so sure of that. But, even if she isn't, I don't suppose she'd stand in the way of his putting things right."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, don't you see, you dear stupid

boy? Who's taken Stanesby, I should like to know?"

"Why, that contractor chap, Feyler. By Jove, Aunt Polly, that girl of his has grand eyes."

"Did you tell her so?"

"Me? No. I haven't got spirits to make love to anyone now; haven't answered little Emmie Bolloy's last four letters. By the way, her husband broke his collar-bone the other day, she tells me. I can't think of anything but Ella. But what were you going to say about the Feylers?"

"Well, when there's a rich heiress ready to marry a lord, and a poor lord who ought to marry a rich heiress, within a few miles of each other, and when the parents on each side are willing, the result ought not to be difficult to divine."

"No," said Mr. George, pondering—"no,

I don't think Harry's the chap to marry for money. By gad! I always forget I ought to hate the beggar! Fellows always hate their rivals, don't they?"

"Yes, unless they can get the better of them, as you can."

"I! How?"

"You are very good friends with Ella, are you not?"

"Yes—at least, so she says—I swore I couldn't be anything less than one thing. But she got me to promise to try to be. Yes, I suppose we are what you would call good friends."

"Well, if I were you, I should just tell her how things stand about Hazelhatch; how he has now a grand chance of putting his family right again—retrieving the old name, and all that sort of thing—and nothing stands in the way except herself. She'd give him up then, fast enough."

"Yes; she's a noble girl!" cried he, enthusiastically.

"Pooh, pooh! only because she's wise enough to see that it's no use fighting when you are sure to lose; and, if she held on, she'd only make enemies of the Lortons for nothing. Besides, do you suppose, George, that old Bannerburn—dear, mad old Bumptious B., as they call him—would wait long to stop the whole affair, if it were hinted that the despised Braye family disliked the alliance? He'd be sure to call it an alliance."

"No, old B. certainly wouldn't like that. I should like to see Lorton say it to him."

"You may be sure it would be said to him somehow. No, no, you needn't be afraid of Harry, as you call him. Try dropping a hint to the Honourable Ella."

"I scarcely could do that; it wouldn't be exactly—honourable."

"All's fair in love and war. However, do as you please. All I can say is, that, if I were a man and wanted a girl, I would not let another man carry her off whilst I had breath in my body."

"I'll think it over," said George, moodily. And his aunt smiled. She knew what his thinking over her suggestions meant.

In all this she was laying no deep scheme, nor, indeed, was she trying to assist her nephew's love affair—innocent love affairs did not interest her. She was only aiming at a little revenge upon the girl for having snubbed him, and, perhaps, for having not very completely hidden her dislike for his aunt.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GREAT PLOT PROGRESSES.

"I REALLY can't bear to think of that odious man coming here this evening," said Lady Lorton; "and what makes it worse is that he says that he does not hunt, so that I shall have to entertain him all day to-morrow!" and she shivered at the thought.

"You ought to like it, my dear," said his lordship, complacently, warming the tails of his red coat at the fire—he had just returned from hunting. "The study of human nature should be interesting to everyone, they say. I don't care about it

myself, but that's a want in me. I always find human nature uncommonly dull; but it's only because I'm dull myself. Now, Harry there will no doubt extract plenty of amusement out of the man."

"And his daughter," put in Violet, a short, thick-set, determined-looking young person, rather gruffly.

"Miss Feyler's a very nice person," said Lady Lorton.

"Oh! of course!" sniffed her daughter; "these vulgar men always have nice children. Vulgarity, like gout, I suppose, skips a generation. It's a bad look-out for Miss Feyler's children, eh, Harry?"

"I don't think that kind of speech is in good taste," said Harry, who had just come into the room with an immensity of mud on his hands and face.

"Oh! Harry," screamed her ladyship, "you've had a fall—you've hurt yourself!

Do look at his face! And you never told me, Lorton!"

"Only mud, mother," said Hazelhatch, taking her hand in his for a moment—"not a scratch! My new mare took the opportunity of giving me a roll in the muddiest place she could find, and then kicked at me on the ground."

"Oh! Harry, what a creature! *Do* give her away!"

"Give her away because she kicked at him when he was down! Why, it only shows how very human-like she is."

"*I* wouldn't kick anyone that was down," said Lady Lorton, pensively regarding the end of a very large shoe.

"I thought you said you had never studied human nature, papa," observed Lady Violet, cutting the page of the book she was reading with a vicious flick.

"Human nature intrudes itself, my dear

—that's the worst of it; it's like King Charles in Mr. Dick's—— Hullo, Harry! are you off?"

"I want to make myself respectable; my face might frighten Miss Feyler into a fit."

"Nonsense, my boy; let her see your honourable scars, and the mud rather suits you. No, wait a bit; they'll be here directly, and we ought to receive them in full family conclave."

"I *cannot* see why you should make such a fuss about these vulgar people!" exclaimed Violet, cutting another page with a snap.

"I daresay not, my dear. Although you read *The Nineteenth Century* and talk about protoplasms, you don't know everything yet."

"You're very unkind about them, Violet," said her ladyship, plaintively.

"Will you believe it, Harry, she utterly refuses to help me with that man to-morrow, but insists on going to some stupid meeting at Foxborough?"

"Why do you have him here if you don't like him?"

Lady Lorton glanced at Harry, and then turned to her husband for assistance.

"Everything has its use," said that gentleman, slowly, also glancing at his son, who was absorbed in the newspaper. "I daresay, Violet, even your meeting at Foxborough has its use. No doubt that fox that ran from spinney to spinney in Delmsdale this morning has his use; or rather had, for, thank heaven, we chopped the brute at last! By the way, Harry, that keeper of old Stubb's is a scoundrel! I don't believe a word of his story of the cubs being drowned, do you?"

"No!" exclaimed Hazelhatch, throwing

down his paper, "not a word; and I'll tell you what it is, father——"

But at this moment Mr. and Miss Feyler were announced, and Hazelhatch's lecture on fox-preserving was postponed. Evelyn Feyler's manner was perfect; even Violet was constrained to admit so much; and Hazelhatch thought he had never seen so graceful a woman, or one who knew so well how to move without affectation or awkwardness. Lord Lorton took her in to dinner, and the way she parried his compliments, and turned off or checked the little stories which were sometimes apt to be a little *risqués*, was charming. Hazelhatch, who sat opposite her, had the eye of an artist, and could not but admire the picturesqueness—picturesqueness without any great oddity—of her costume; the well-shaped head, with its simple coil of red-brown hair; the self-possessed,

gentle manners; the fascinating smile; the lithe figure; the soft white skin, and the dainty little hands. It was—as he said to himself—almost impossible to believe that she was the daughter of the blatant, vulgar man laying down the law and talking of himself at the other end of the table.

"I wonder what her mother was like," thought he, and invested the poor H-less lady with many imaginary charms. It is wonderful what education will do when joined to and aiding it are intelligence and ambition.

Evelyn Feyler had been early sent to a school kept by a lady whose recollections were all of the days when she had been the denizen, as governess, of lordly houses; and who scarcely concealed her contempt for the daughters of rich merchants who came to be educated by her. Evelyn was stung by this contempt; and, taking into

her little head that the world outside would share Miss Grandy's ideas, determined that, if not quite the real thing, she would fit herself to pass for it, or for something very like it. And, as she fathomed the littlenesses and meannesses in this Miss Grandy's character, she imbibed that disdain of those she was to seek to emulate that had now grown strong within her. She saw—or thought that she saw—that money alone would not place her in the front rank required by her ambition—she must "learn to be a lady"—and she set herself to work at this with such goodwill that Miss Grandy observed, at her leaving the school (when there were many wet eyes, for Evelyn had loveable qualities), that she, notwithstanding her other disadvantages, might, owing to her (Miss Grandy's) teaching, yet worthily adorn a duchess's coronet.

Poor Miss Grandy, notwithstanding the position which her frequent mention of her great patrons of old days gave her, had become, during the end of Miss Feyler's stay, a little frightened by the handsome, clever girl, with her flashing eyes and grand manners. She had a suspicion, poor lady, that sometimes when her pupil was drawing her out concerning what the marchioness said, or how the earl buttoned his daughter's boots at lunch to set her a lesson of neatness, she was laughing at her teacher; even her speech on parting was not quite a comfortable one.

"Good-bye, Miss Grandy. I am very much obliged to you. You have taught me that a peeress is the noblest work of God; and that to be a 'lady' is to be 'far above rubies.' I will try to profit by your instruction, and be far beyond a ruby."

That was her one fault. Miss Grandy

had not been able to make her understand that "ladies" are never sarcastic.

She was anything but sarcastic, however, on the occasion of her first visit to Braye House, and quite enchanted all of them except Violet, who was seldom enchanted by anyone. Among her other accomplishments she sang well, having a full, well-trained voice and a good ear: and accompanied herself on the piano, while she sang any song they demanded of her, her *répertoire* being extensive. Something told her that Hazelhatch would like simple French and English songs better than any of the more showy performances she herself delighted in, and which pleased so much her father's guests. And as he sat and watched her graceful figure, and heard her pathetic tones, he said to himself that, for a man who had no pre-occupation, this was a woman who might, even with-

out her fortune, be very sweet to win.

We are not going too far when we say that Evelyn Feyler had not spoken two words to Hazelhatch before she had made up her mind to be his wife. She was quick at reading characters, and she read in his face honesty, good temper, and—not exactly credulity, for she saw he was no fool—but a great deal of that power of trusting others which makes people so happy, and sometimes so miserable.

She had no *confidante;* that was a weakness she despised; but, had she had one, she would probably have told her that night, at their "conference of undress," that Lord Hazelhatch would "do."

And of course it was not long before she saw that the Braye family—at least, the heads of it—also thought that she would do, though perhaps she would have been astonished had she heard her father's con-

versation with Lord Lorton in the smoking-room before Hazelhatch had come down, the latter having remained upstairs to write a letter to Ella.

"Yes, she is a nice girl, and a pretty girl, and an accomplished girl, as you say, my lord. I've spared no pains or expense on her education. And her looks speak for themselves. She's worthy of anyone, Lord Lorton; and the day she marries I put down a hundred thousand pounds, with more to follow—with more to follow!" and he chuckled till he swallowed some of the smoke from his cigar and coughed himself black in the face.

"Ah!" said the other, reflectively, when the millionaire's spasm had passed. "Certainly money is a very fine thing. I don't care very much for it myself; but for a young man—now, my son, for instance—in the present day money is almost a necessity of

his position. And, you see, money don't grow with us as it does with you. We're a little—don't whisper it to an American—a little effete. New blood is what we torpid people want."

"That's just what I say! What's the good of an earl or a baron and such like unless he can act up to it? That's where it is. Not that poverty is exactly a disgrace——"

"Not exactly," put in Lord Lorton.

"But it ain't far off. Just fancy your feelings at reading in the paper, 'Bankruptcy of Lord Viscount Hazelhatch!' Not that I mean *you* are anywhere near that; I only put it as a case. But, as I say, there's my daughter now. As good as she's beautiful, with a hundred thou' now, and expectations—pretty good ones. That's worth a coronet, eh, my lord?"

"Miss Evelyn is a beautiful young lady,

and would adorn any station," said his lordship, thankful that his son's entrance put a stop to the conversation, which was going a little too fast for him.

Besides, he had from experience a strong dislike to arranging anything after dinner, when the other party had evidently taken his fair share of wine. No, when he and this purse-proud gentleman came to terms, they must be solidly settled in a proper manner, and not be liable to repudiation in the morning.

Fate played well into the hands of the plotters next day, for somehow or other Hazelhatch found himself during most of it riding by Miss Evelyn's side, admiring her seat and figure, and forced to confess that her delicate, very delicate, flattery was not unpleasant to him. Of course he knew perfectly well why the girl had been brought to Braye, and he said to himself

that he would have been very angry were it not that his engagement to Ella rendered him quite secure. There was surely no reason why he should not enjoy the conversation of this beautiful young lady. As they were neither of them likely to fall in love with the other there could be no harm done.

The Feylers had been persuaded to stay till the next day, and that night at dinner he said carelessly to Evelyn, as he was hunting through her music for a song he wished to hear, "By the way, my mother said you had visitors at Stanesby."

"No—at least, yes, one. Granville Hereward is there."

"And who is Mr. Hereward?"

"A great friend of mine—the son of a distant relation of papa's, but we call each other cousins. He's my old playfellow, you know."

"Ah, yes; but he is not there still?"

"Yes. Papa didn't like——"

"Why, he'll be bored to death. I wish we'd known. It really must seem so rude."

"No. I think we are the only people who have been rude—to him, at least. Shall I tell you a secret, Lord Hazelhatch? I believe papa doesn't think he's good enough; but I say that, if he is good enough to be our friend, he is good enough to know our other friends. Don't you agree with me?"

Hazelhatch admired her more than ever as she said these words, with a sudden flush upon her cheek, and he liked her standing up for her friend too.

"Of course I do. I'll come over to Stanesby next non-hunting day, and you shall introduce me to Mr. Hereward. If he hunts, I'll mount him. I am glad to

see you stand up for the absent, Miss Feyler."

"Yes. You see we are only rising people—not risen, like you; but all the same I hate meanness. Don't you, Lord Hazelhatch?"

And, as he said "Yes," he thought he had seldom met a woman he could have liked so much—had it not been that he could like no one now in *that* way except Ella Bannerburn.

CHAPTER X.

GEORGE NEWSBURY TRIES DIPLOMACY.

AND while Hazelhatch was braving the danger of Evelyn Feyler's bright eyes and clever flattery, wrapped in the impenetrable armour of his love for Ella, the latter young person—not, perhaps, knowing so much about armour as her lover did—was not quite comfortable. She had been out hunting, and seen how persistently the heiress had monopolized his attentions, and she thought she had seen that, although it was quite true that scarcely any opportunity occurred for him to speak to herself, yet he had seemed to

be not very discontented at the loss. She lived so much upon the occasional look, or whisper, or hand-pressure which they exchanged, that to see him for five or six hours and not even to receive one loving look was very painful to her. Not that she doubted his loyalty—she believed in him as she did in herself—and to be false to Harry! Forbid it, ye gods of constancy! Then one or two remarks she had heard in the hunting-field were not calculated to make her any happier. People seemed to think there was something correct in the propinquity of Hazelhatch and the heiress, and she heard several meaning chuckles when it became known that already the Feylers had gone to stay at Braye.

"They're not letting a chance slip," said George Newsbury.

"I don't understand you," replied the

young lady, as coldly as she could. She did not like to be very cold to him, for perhaps she had done him a wrong, and there was a vast amount of pity in her nature.

"Don't you? Well, it's pretty evident," said he, shrugging his shoulders; and then some one came up, and they had no further opportunity of speaking on the subject.

But although, of course, people were ridiculous in their wisdom, and although there was nothing at all odd in Hazelhatch riding with a young lady staying at his father's house, yet it gave poor little Ella rather a heartache, and it is to be feared that she was more than usually abrupt in her replies to young Bob Manisty as he escorted her home. To a certain extent he deserved to be snubbed, for the young gentleman had eyes in his head,

and perhaps some of his remarks were not quite so innocent as he meant them to appear.

"It would be very nice for Lord Hazelhatch to marry that girl, wouldn't it? She's so rich. And then he could keep the hounds and a lot more horses."

No reply.

"Don't you think so, Ella?"

"Do let us jog on, Bob. I never knew a horse walk so slowly as yours, and I'm as cold as ice," said Ella, crossly.

"Yes; but don't you think so?" persisted the boy, touching his horse—one that paid the double debt of carriage horse and occasional hunter—with his spur.

"You shouldn't talk of what you don't understand."

"Oh, I understand all about marriage, Ella; the girls are always talking of it."

"Well, I don't care to talk of it; so that's enough."

After this they traversed a mile or two in silence. Then Master Bob came to the charge again—

"She's a very fine girl, isn't she, Ella? And did you see her horse? Lord Lorton's groom told me that it cost five hundred pounds. Tom Bobbit told me that Lord Hazelhatch—— But I forgot; I mustn't mention him," said Bob, stopping suddenly, and stealing a sly glance at her.

"Who said you mightn't? I hate people who don't finish their sentences! What is it about Lord Hazelhatch?"

"Oh, nothing; only Tom Bobbit said that it's all settled by the old 'uns, and Lord Hazelhatch was very spoony on her. I'm sure he looked it to-day."

"Tom Bobbit is a meddling, mischievous donkey!" cried Ella, in her wrath,

"and you're nearly as bad to repeat his nonsense. Lord Hazelhatch was quite right to be civil to a stranger—particularly as the Feylers will want a little help at first," she added, with a touch of spite.

"Well, I don't see what it matters to *us* one way or the other," said Bob, looking her straight in the face. Ella felt marvellously tempted to try the strength of her little hunting-whip on his shoulders—she had been so intimate with him that she almost forgot that he was now eighteen, and called himself a man—but controlled her temper, and only trotted on faster, thankful to reach home at last, and escape from her tormentor.

"What exile from himself can flee?"

Bob's idle words rang in her ears all through a sleepless night, and when, next day, a servant announced that Mr. George

Newsbury had called, and, Mr. Bannerburn being out, had expressed a wish to see her, she was thoroughly out of spirits, and inclined to despond. The many advantages that would accrue to her lover, should he marry this rich woman, had only gradually come home to her; and now she was rather inclined to exaggerate them. What was *she* to venture to oppose this consummation because of her love? Her father had often preached to her how *love* was an artificial thing, short-lived at the best, an unreality with most people. How terrible it would be if some day Harry were to turn upon her and tell her that their mutual faith had spoiled his life! Not her life, for she was sure of her own love, however it might be with others. But it was—after the lessons she had been taught by her best friend—surely the very insanity of vanity in her to suppose that

she should certainly be able to avert so common a fate of a loving woman as to be tired of? Suppose that he tired of her love? What had she to give besides? And this girl with whom he probably was at that moment had so much besides! Such thoughts were in her mind when George Newsbury entered the room.

It must be confessed that he had come on a somewhat difficult task. To tell a girl that she had better have you because another man does not want her is not likely to engender much love for yourself in her heart, though, as he said in his youthful philosophy, "women are so devilish odd—you can never tell what they'll do."

He had thought for several days over his wise aunt's advice; and, after seeing the proceedings of last day's hunting, he had hardened his heart, and driven over to Castle Dorington to tempt Fate again.

Although he had but lately been refused by the "Honourable Ella," the refusal had been done so kindly and regretfully that it did not hurt him in the way of wounding his vanity: it only wounded his heart, which is not half so vital a part.

Ella was horrified to think that, because she liked talking and laughing with him—*flirting* with him, perhaps (the word is a vague one)—she had been the means of causing him pain and mortification; and no discarded lover ever left lady's presence with less sense of the ridiculous than he had.

So their meeting was not a very embarrassed one. They talked of yesterday's wretched sport; of sundry *lâches* lately committed by a villainous landowner in the county, who dared to prefer pheasants to foxes. They laughed over the last *bon mot* of the county wit, and they speculated

on the chances of success of the coming Hunt Ball; and then George began to hum and haw, and show clearly that his visit was not only for such innocent diversion.

"Good heavens! he can't be going to propose to me again!" mentally exclaimed poor Ella, observing his fidgety hands and the accession of colour in the face. But she only said aloud—

"Oh! *please*, Mr. Newsbury, you're untidying all those papers which I've just got into order for papa."

Deprived of the relief of pulling something about, he put his hands resolutely in his pockets, stared hard at his neat boots, and began—

"You—you said the other day, Ella—perhaps I ought to say Miss Bannerburn, as you call me Mr. Newsbury?"

"No, George, you can call me Ella.

Well, what did I say the other day?"

"You know."

"Yes, George, I know. I said I couldn't be to you what you wished, but that I hoped we should always be good friends, as we have been. And I told you how very sorry I was—how much I blamed myself for the mistake."

"But you wished to be friends with me still?"

"You know I do."

"Well, then, Ella, I suppose I may talk to you like a friend?"

"Of course, George," said she, wondering.

"And you won't be offended?"

"Not unless you say something very dreadful."

"You know, Ella, although you won't have me, that doesn't prevent me caring for you just the same—more than I ever could for any other woman; and—and I

can't bear to see you being made a fool of."

"Made a fool of!"

"Yes; don't you see?" he had risen now in his excitement, and stood opposite where she sat, her angry eyes fixed on his face; "don't you see it all, Ella? I know you care for Harry, and I know you think he cares equally for you——"

"How dare you——"

He remembered his aunt's direction, "Get the words out, don't let her begin till she's heard them," and went on in a louder voice, not daring to meet her look, "I believe he did, Ella, but he is poor, his father is terribly hard up, and they have got the Feylers here on purpose; and now it's really settled between them. Don't be angry with *me!* It's because I love you so much——" She made an angry gesture. "Yes, I do; though you may despise my love, at least it is *honest*."

"Mr. Newsbury!" she exclaimed, starting to her feet.

"Hear me out. I say it is because I love you so much that I cannot bear to see you played with. I tell you that it is all settled that in due time Harry is to marry Miss Feyler and her money. Of course he will have to break with you; but he won't hurry, I daresay. Of course, as long as he can keep the two things going together, the pleasanter for him. But, Ella, do try to think what your position would be, supposing that he refuses to give you up even, and you stand between him and the setting up of his family. Think——"

"Stop, Mr. Newsbury!" cried Ella, in a voice of concentrated passion; "stop! I may have given you the right to ask me to be your wife, though I would sooner break stones upon the road, but I can never have given you the right to insult me!"

"I was afraid you would be angry," said George, meekly.

He had repeated his lesson, and done it very well, considering, and he was prepared for a little wrath at first.

"She won't be angry with you long," Miss Newsbury had said. "She must see you are her true friend in the end."

But just at present it did not look very like it.

"Who gave you the right to pry into my affairs? Who appointed you as my adviser? Why, if Lord Hazelhatch knew what you had said, he would horsewhip you, as you deserve!"

"If what I say is not the fact——" began he.

"Silence, sir, and listen to me. I do not know how much of all this you have invented, or how much is the tittle-tattle of ill-natured people; but this I do know,

that you shall never have the opportunity of saying such words to me again! Go!"

Now, when a man is told to go by an angry young woman, who stands pointing to the door, and waiting for him to obey her, it is very hard for him to leave a room gracefully. There is always something humiliating about being morally or physically kicked out; and poor George Newsbury felt, as he would have phrased it, remarkably "mean" as he took up his hat, stick, and gloves, and descended to where his dog-cart awaited him.

He had hoped that, after saying what he came to say, he might have patiently borne her anger for a time, and then gradually soothed it away; but now it was evident that she intended most decidedly to quarrel with him. "And she doesn't believe me either," he groaned to himself, not knowing that the sting of what he said lay in the

fact that she did believe him. She did not believe that Harry was false to her, certainly; but she did believe that every effort would be made to cause this falseness, and the dreadful thought was not now to be escaped or evaded that she would be doing him an injury by demanding that he should be loyal.

What should she do? Surely nothing yet. There could be no harm in her waiting to see how matters went. But in the meantime all the glorious illusions of her love-dream had fled, and when she and Hazelhatch met after this episode, in her heart there would be more of the bitterness of doubt than of any other feeling.

But still, in the dim background, yet pervading all the picture, was the sweet thought of martyrdom for his sake—the knowledge that, should it be required of her, she could let him trample on her

heart if it made his path softer, and smile upon him and love him all the more as he did so.

CHAPTER XI.

ANOTHER BUSINESS CONVERSATION.

"A HUNDRED THOUSAND POUNDS at five per cent. makes an income of five thousand a year," said Lord Lorton, with the air of a man propounding a new theory.

"Most decidedly, father," said Hazelhatch, with profound conviction.

"My allowance to you now is——"

"Well," hesitated the other, "you call it a thousand, I believe, but——"

"Pay it somewhat irregularly, I fear, my dear boy. Yes—*ex nihilo nihil fit*—and

I have never been able to make those estimable bankers, Bore and Taddle (by the way, I hear Taddle has some nice horses coming up at Tattersall's next week; I daresay I might buy one or two) —I say I've never been able to make them understand that my promise to you binds them equally as men of honour to pay you £250 a quarter, regardless of the state of my account."

"Perverse fellows, business men," said Hazelhatch, smiling.

"Business men! They know no more of business than this cigar. Why, I gave them a splendid opportunity for a stroke of business the other day: told them distinctly that if they would carry out an arrangement I proposed—a slight overdraught, you know—I should consider myself under an obligation: and they missed the opportunity!"

"Perhaps they like money better than obligations."

"I'm afraid you're not much better than they are, Harry," said his lordship, shaking his head sadly. "Don't look deeper into things than they do. After all, even a couple of donkeys must see that my difficulties are only temporary, and that by putting me under an obligation they ensure, when my affairs come to a proper footing again——"

"Ah, *when!*"

"Well, you don't suppose this sort of thing is going to last. The depression of trade just now——"

"My dear father," interrupted Hazelhatch, with some impatience, "you don't mean to say that the depression of trade has anything to do with your affairs?"

"Indirectly, my dear boy, certainly, but of course indirectly. Reciprocity would

set me up again—would set up everyone. What are iron and coal worth now, I should like to know, and what is Bismarck doing?"

"But you haven't any iron or coal, and Bismarck didn't put the mortgages on your property. If there were a little reciprocity between butchers and eaters of meat, then, perhaps——"

"My dear Harry, you don't understand the rudiments of political economy. If Cobden were alive to hear all the twaddle of the free-traders now he would turn in his grave—at least, I mean he'd be confoundedly disgusted. The fact is that the owners of land just now are the victims of a huge conspiracy. Look, for instance, at the goings on in Stubbs's wood. I don't believe there'll be a fox left in that side of the county soon."

Hazelhatch was not sorry to get upon

the time-honoured subject of Mr. Stubbs's pheasant-loving proclivities, particularly as he saw the drift of the conversation his father had begun; but the latter was not to be baffled, and when Mr. Stubbs, his keeper, his underkeeper, and all connected with him had been consigned to perdition —to the Inferno of Vulpecides—he harked back again.

"But what was I saying? Oh, yes! You know the interest of a hundred thousand pounds is——"

"Five thousand a year at five per cent. Yes!"

"That lovely girl has that, and much more to follow. Feyler is an apoplectic-looking fellow, and he over-eats himself sadly. What livers these City men must have! I shall never forget one City feast where I saw old Alderman Jones—— But I wish you'd stick to the subject, Harry.

You put me out. As I said, Miss Feyler is worthy to marry anyone."

"Even Alderman Jones?"

"Alderman Jones is, I believe, married, and is more than fifty years old," said Lord Lorton, in accents of dignified rebuke. "I believe Miss Feyler *can* marry anyone."

"Yes, she looks determined."

"She is lovely."

"Yes."

"And her manners are perfect."

"Yes."

"And her temper is admirable."

"I daresay."

"And her mind is cultivated."

"Yes."

"And she sings beautifully."

"Yes."

"Don't go on saying 'Yes' like a parrot. Where's her fault? Don't you think she is sound?

"I've no reason to doubt it," said Hazelhatch, laughing.

"Well?"

"Well!"

"Confound it, Harry, you don't help me a bit! and you know I detest these business conversations, particularly as I've a thousand things of importance to do to-day—no less than three horses waiting for me to see."

"You can't detest them more than I do."

"Well, then, come to the point. Or perhaps I'd better?"

"Perhaps."

"Well, I had a long talk with Mr. Feyler the other day; went to see him at Stanesby."

"Oh, *that's* where you went that day."

"Yes, and missed the gallop from Greeby Gorse; all for your sake, you ungrateful dog."

"For my sake?"

"Yes. Listen! I told—or rather I hinted to—Mr. Feyler that I was embarrassed just at present——"

"Father! I am astonished!" began the son, jumping up.

"Never mind. Astonishment is a charming sensation; produces healthy hunger, I have been told; but, unfortunately, I have lived beyond the age of astonishment. Well, what do you think Mr. Feyler did? In the most delicate way in the world—in *his* world, I mean, of course—he offered to lend me, at $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., enough to clear off those last loans, which are costing me, with the insurance and all that, about ten per cent. He assures me that, as a business man, and he is one, you will allow, he considers $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. very fair profit—on land, of course."

"And yet you couldn't get it under ten."

"Exactly—the difference between dealing with men of business and men who are not. The fact is that Graines is no use as far as getting money is concerned. He looks at the matter from too narrow a standpoint."

"And you accepted this offer?"

"Well, there are preliminaries to be arranged. I believe Mr. Feyler's solicitor will have to examine the title, some twaddle of that sort—I think Feyler's word was 'twaddle.' But there's no danger of the offer being withdrawn. The fact is, it's a devilish good thing for him, with its contingent advantages."

"What do you mean by that?" cried Hazelhatch, hotly.

"Never mind, Harry."

"But I do mind——"

"Your own business. This is mine. All I can tell you is that if something of this sort were not done, and done soon too, there'd be a smash. You should not only think of yourself. There are others to be considered—your sister, for instance. Is she to be cut off from all chances of marrying; from the society and the pleasures that are, I may say, her right? Is your mother to be condemned to renounce all her friends and habits? I say nothing of myself, for indeed I have remarked that the elderly gentlemen in shabby clothes who watch the sea-sick people coming out of the boat at Boulogne look rather happy than otherwise. I daresay there's a deal of too little appreciated pleasure in dodging your creditors, and in reading—when you can get the loan of *Galignani*—of yourself under the interesting description of an absconding bankrupt."

"Really, father, you never can be serious for a moment!"

"Serious! If I'm not serious now I never was in my life. I think my picture more than serious—tragical."

"So it is—in a sense."

"And your transcendental ideas are tragical in their nonsense. But I really must see these quadrupeds. There's a chestnut of Barber's which will be dirt cheap at £200, and you know how short of horses I am. Think over what I have said, my dear boy, think well over it. I may not be as clever in some ways as you—though, by Jove, sir, I could write verses in my day with anyone—did I ever show you any? I will—no, I may be a little rusty in some ways, but, as Hamlet says, I know a hawk from a handsaw still."

And out went Lord Lorton, twisting his moustache with all the gay *insouçiance* of a

man in whose heart there was no care.

In his son's, however, there was plenty. This information filled him with dismay. Serious thoughts of riding at once to Stanesby and forbidding Mr. Feyler to lend his father money came into his mind. And then there also came a very disagreeable recollection—his own debts. They were really small for a young man in his position, who had been brought up to consider he had a prescriptive right to the best of everything; they were nothing for the heir of Braye, nothing for a young man with an allowance of £1,000 a year. Only the other day, hearing the conversation of several impecunious and reckless youths at the Club, he had congratulated himself on his own prudence. The irregularity in the payment of his allowance he had always put down to his father's want of business habits, and never dream-

ed but that he had only to speak to get the arrear paid in. But, now that he knew the truth, these debts loomed up big and threatening. Only three or four thousand pounds—but how was he to get them?

Could he go to his father and confess that he wanted money at the same time that he forbade him to borrow it at a favourable rate of interest? And what, in his eyes, still further complicated matters was that he was engaged to dine and sleep that very night at Stanesby Manor, where the hounds met next day. He sat down and commenced a note to Mr. Feyler, to express his regret at being prevented, &c., when, remembering that Miss Evelyn had told him that, as their first party in the county, they were very nervous about their guests on this occasion, and counted especially on him, he tore up the note and made up his mind to face the situation.

Perhaps, had the young lady been, after the usual manner of heiresses, ill-favoured or elderly, the situation would have been easier to face, and it would have been simpler for him to stand by loyalty and poverty. But when worldly advantages came towards you with so beautiful an appearance as Evelyn Feyler, it was, as George Newsbury would have expressed it, "trying a man very high."

Evelyn undoubtedly was, as Hazelhatch owned to himself, about the most beautiful and most seductive woman he had ever seen, and her scarcely concealed preference for himself did not lessen her charms in his eyes. As he drove up to the door of Stanesby Manor, just in time to have a chat with the men in the house before going upstairs to dress, he had, we fear, thought more on the way of the dark blue eyes of the heiress than of the brown ones

of his love. Although he did not yet own it to himself, the idea of five thousand a year in Braye Lodge—a small house in the park, which, it had always been understood, he was to inhabit when he married—was very pleasant, and was a very different thing from the life of stoical self-denial he had chalked out for himself since he heard the truth of their position from his father. Was there not some reasonableness too in Lord Lorton's words? Had he a right to utterly neglect the prosperity and well-doing of his family, just to please himself? And was he quite sure it would please himself? There was no doubt about his love for Ella, but would not that very love make poverty with her harder to bear? How could he like to see her going without what other women had? Why, her very patience and good temper would hourly rebuke him. Well, at any

rate, there was no necessity to decide anything yet awhile, he thought, as he tied his white tie in the gorgeous bed-room allotted to him; and when he shook hands with Miss Evelyn downstairs, and marked her artistically shy smile of welcome, he vowed once again to himself that, money or no money, she was a woman most men would deem well worth the winning.

CHAPTER XII.

GRANVILLE HEREWARD GETS A KISS.

THE breakfast-room at Stanesby Manor opened out of a small ante-room, mostly composed of a big bow-window, with seats around it, which was always full of flowers, and in which Evelyn kept her love-birds and parroquets. It looked south, and was a favourite lounge of hers when she had grown tired of her own room, or boudoir, upstairs. For you could not sit here long without some one coming by; as one of the doors, usually kept open, led into the big morning-room —or saloon, as Mr. Feyler liked to call

it—which was the common living room of the house, the drawing-room being only used after dinner.

Evelyn was not accustomed to shorten her "beauty-sleep" by a minute more than necessary, and, indeed, unless there were special reasons for attending breakfast, seldom honoured that repast with her presence; so it must have been a coincidence that led her to arise half-an-hour too early even for a hunting breakfast on this especial morning; when, oddly enough, Mr. Granville Hereward had done the same. Once up, however, there was nothing odd in their meeting in the bow-window; for that was where they would naturally wait for the summons of the breakfast-gong. Mr. Feyler had attempted family prayers at first, as the proper thing for the place; but Evelyn had put the practice down with determination,

rather to the secret relief of her father, who stumbled painfully over the long Scriptural names, and who had a vivid notion while he read that his solemn butler—who had been with the Duke of Highgate—was on the alert to detect the misplacement of a single "h."

Instead of the usual morning greeting, all the young lady said on entering the room and finding Hereward there, was the monosyllable—

"Well?"

"You know what I want to say well enough, Evelyn."

"Then I scarcely see why I should have got up so early. I hate getting up early."

"I am going to town to-day."

"Yes, and I rather envy you. This place is terribly dull."

"It's just paradise to me—Paradise Lost."

"Well, it will be Paradise Regained very soon. Ain't you coming here again next month?"

"Yes; but what may not happen before then?"

"We may all die—or go mad. Certainly we shall be about a month older—and wiser."

"I think you are very cruel, Evelyn."

"Am I?" said the girl, opening her great eyes in affected surprise. "Ask my love-birds if I'm cruel. Do I ever forget any of their luxuries, eh?" and she put her lips to the bars of the cage, and made the noise which birds are usually supposed to consider as a mark of affection.

"Attend to me," said Hereward, roughly, taking her hand, which she did not attempt to withdraw. "What do you mean to do about him?"

"About whom?"

"This lord."

"What sort of thing do you mean?"

"Are you going to let him make love to you?"

"Well—yes—I suppose so."

"And to marry him?"

"Well—yes—I suppose so, if he asks me. But don't, Granville, you are hurting my hand. You don't know how strong you are."

"I should like to kill you."

"Should you? Oh, no! It's only the young man who has kept company with, and been discarded by, the maid-of-all-work, who does that sort of thing; and he's hanged, you know."

"What would life matter to me without you. Oh! my darling, has all your love for me quite gone? You *did* like me."

"And do still. Why are you so foolish, Granville? Liking—loving if you choose

to call it so—is a thing quite apart from —from marriage. Why you, as much as papa or Miss Grandy, have taught me that lesson."

"But we were all of us wrong, Evelyn; d——nably wrong. I cannot bear to see you belong to some one else."

He was standing close to her, face to face, with both her hands in his, with his eyes hungrily fixed on hers—and hers were soft and pitiful.

"My poor boy, you see the difference between theory and practice. But I *am* the philosopher you pretended to be, you see. I am very fond of you—I can't remember when I wasn't—ever since you used to carry me about on your back, and help me to make sand castles on the beach at Brighton; and I would far rather you were Lord Hazelhatch, and he was Mr. Hereward, the stockbroker. But you see,

dear, we must take things as we find them. Mustn't we?"

"But I will rise in the world, Evelyn; only wait. I will make money, and get into Society; only wait!" he pleaded, putting one arm round her waist.

"What I want is beyond the power of money."

"No! nothing now is beyond the power of money. Why, it is only your money that brings this man here."

"Only that, you think?" she said, with a slight smile.

He pressed his lips to hers passionately, almost more with the passion of hate than of love.

"Oh, I know how beautiful you are; how you could make any man mad for love for you! Oh, Evelyn, my bright darling, my own, my love, I cannot bear to give you up!" And, relinquishing her from

his grasp, he bent his head upon the mantel-piece, and his frame shook with emotion. For one moment, as she looked at him, her lip quivered, and there was a moisture in her eyes; and when she spoke again her voice was husky.

"This must be the last time, Granville, that we talk to each other like this. It does neither of us good. We have each our aims and ends in life. You know what mine is—I have told you a thousand times. Yours is to work, to make money, to enter Parliament, and to show the world that you are not a man to be trodden down, be your birth and blood what they may. Is it for us, brought up as we have been, to waste our time whining about love and constancy like a couple of romantic school-girls? Be a man, Granville. Our separation is not a real one. Do you think I shall not choose my own friends when I

am married? Do you think that event will change my feelings? I should like to have lived with you always, but it couldn't be. We have enjoyed our lives hitherto very much; don't let any romantic nonsense stand between us now. We will always be friends, dear, will we not?"

Once more he caught her in his arms.

"Yes, darling, always; you are stronger than I am—and you are right. But the pill is bitter. Evelyn," he went on, looking at her face, which had regained its calmness, curiously, "you are a wonderful woman. I wonder whether it is best to be so worldly."

"Sometimes I have wondered so too. But now I have chosen. It *is* best."

"And you will always love me?"

"You will always be my best friend."

"I suppose that I must be content with

that. Will you give me one more kiss? Of your own accord, I mean?"

She just touched his lips with hers, and had hardly done so when the door opened, and Mr. Feyler entered, in a wonderful costume which left you puzzled as to whether his occupation that day was to be hunting, shooting, farming, or rat-catching.

"Down early, Evelyn," he said, glancing suspiciously at Hereward.

"Dear me, papa, what a dress! I thought I told you the other day that, because you don't jump or care to stay out long, there is no reason you shouldn't dress like any other gentleman out hunting."

"It don't matter what clothes a gentleman wears—he always looks what he is," said Mr. Feyler; "I read that somewhere once."

"But then he's got to *be* a gentleman,"

said Evelyn, curtly. "But here's Lord Hazelhatch. *He* might look nice even in your clothes, I grant you."

Mr. Feyler rather liked being snubbed by his splendid daughter, as long as it did not occur before many witnesses, and any soreness which her remark may have left was speedily healed by the exquisite grace with which she flirted airily with Hazelhatch throughout breakfast. When the hounds came, however, and all the ceremonies of a lawn-meet had been got over, he was not quite so well pleased by a little episode he happened to witness.

Evelyn was just about to mount her horse, and Hazelhatch and Hereward were both anxiously waiting her permission to give the requisite assistance. She glanced at the former, and he stooped eagerly down towards her little foot.

"Oh, thanks, Lord Hazelhatch; but I

think—if you don't mind—Granville is so accustomed to putting me up." And Hereward was the chosen one.

Hazelhatch wondered why so small a thing annoyed him; wondered why he suddenly became aware that he detested nothing so much as a good-looking, olive-tinted, curly-haired young Jew of the Hereward type. Had he known that this favour of putting her in the saddle was all the reparation the young Jew got for being jilted, he might, perhaps, have pitied him.

CHAPTER XIII.

FLIRT OR JILT, OR BOTH?

"MY DEAREST HARRY,—I hope you will not be offended or hurt with me for what I am going to say, for you know, dearest, that I *could* not mean to hurt or offend you. I have thought it all over a great deal lately; indeed, I do not think I have thought of anything else at all since the day when you first told me that you loved me. I thought then, Harry, that 'love was enough;' but it is beginning to be forced upon me that such an idea is foolish and wrong——"

"Hullo!" ejaculated Hazelhatch, who was reading this letter one evening on his return from hunting.

"—however poetical and pleasant it may sound. Even in my short experience I have seen love-matches, as they are called, turn into hate-unions; and I have seen marriages which made one despise the man and the woman for their greed or their folly turn out very well. So, you see, I have some reason for what I say."

"What can she be driving at?" said Hazelhatch, pulling his moustache in perplexity.

"I think, Harry dear, that when you told me of your position, your father's troubles, and your own resolves, I did not think quite seriously enough of it all—I did not quite take in what a terrible thing it all

was. Love—and my love for you was very strong——"

"What does she mean by 'was'?"

"—is apt to make one a little selfish and blind, and I own that even what you told me was nearly forgotten in the delight of knowing that you were fond of me. But I have had time to think since, and the truth has come to me: I have been able to see at last what my duty really is. I know you are so good and generous that never in the future, did we live a thousand years, would a word or a look of reproach escape you; but I should reproach myself; and think how terrible it would be for me all my life to be obliged to think of the injury I had done the one whom above all I loved and wished to do good to! No, Harry; I couldn't bear it. We must never be married."

"This comes to the point with a vengeance," said the young man.

"You must see this as clearly as I do, for you are far cleverer and know more of the world. In time—when the bitterness of this has a little passed—we may be friends, Harry. There will never be anything wrong in that. Just now I don't think I could quite bear to meet you, for I am weak—and—oh, Harry, what a hard place this world is!"

He pressed the letter to his lips, and read on—

"But, hard or not, we each of us have our duty to do; and I suppose mine is to bear this patiently. I am sure it is my duty to say what I am saying to you now. Don't try to persuade me otherwise, dear Harry. It would do no good, for I have really and

truly made up my mind, and it would add to my pain and sorrow. I could rather bear for you to say bitter things, or to think I do not love you, than to have to resist your wishes. Look at it not only as regarding yourself, dear. You know there are others—your father, your sister. Your making a bad marriage would, as far as I can see, take away the only chance there is of your family's position being put right.

"I think that it really is your duty—your solemn duty—to put me and your feelings for me away from your thoughts. Don't quite forget me—I couldn't quite bear that—but only think of me as a friend, a friend whose greatest wish in this world is that you may be happy.

"I have heard rumours of a possible arrangement which you might easily make to put things right; indeed I have been

told a great deal more than could be true. I do not know her except to speak to, but she looks all that could be wished. If this should be, you will believe that I shall be sincerely glad,—that is, if she is worthy of you,—won't you?"

"Ah!" said Hazelhatch, "I begin to see a reason for all this. Confound their tattling tongues! I should like to cut Polly Newsbury's out!"

"I dread to think of what you may say when you get this letter—that is, before you have thought it over and seen that I am right. Don't be angry with me; and do not, I pray you, Harry, imagine that I write because of any stories I may have heard. Perhaps these stories may have helped to open my eyes to the necessity of our breaking off our engagement. From now, Harry, we are both free. And we have

done nothing to reproach each other for, have we? It would have been harder to break off later on—at least, it would for me; and, once I had made up my mind, I felt I ought to write. Send me a little line to say you understand me. In a very short time you will agree with me.

"Your affectionate friend,

"Ella Bannerburn."

Now Hazelhatch had seen a great deal both of Miss Newsbury and of Miss Feyler, who had been on a visit to Grove Cottage, lately; and those two ladies, who had quickly become dear friends, had managed to instil into his mind two facts—or what they presented as facts—firstly, that Ella Bannerburn had really gone much further than was generally supposed with George Newsbury; and, secondly, that Evelyn Feyler was a very lovely and

loveable young woman, of high character, and almost too rigid morals. Hazelhatch, like a good many other men, liked rigid morals, austere conduct, on the part of his lady acquaintances, except as regarded himself; and, however much Evelyn flirted with him, it never occurred to him that she would flirt with anyone else.

Each man is an exception to every rule to himself: *the* exception that proves the truth of it as regards other people.

And Evelyn flirted, it must be owned, in a very subdued and ladylike manner. She saw at once that Hazelhatch had rather a high standard of what women should be like; and managed so well that—putting Ella Bannerburn on one side—he did think her almost perfect in her way of gently showing her preference for his society. She was a woman whose preference would have flattered Narcissus; for her usual stately,

rather cold reserve formed an effective contrast to the softness she could throw at rare moments into her voice and into her eyes.

Thinking so much of this seductive young person as he did, it very naturally seemed to him certain that she was the cause of Ella's letter; and that one lovely woman should be jealous of another, all on account of oneself, is pleasant to the most modest of men, which Hazelhatch certainly was not. Still Ella was of rather an obstinate disposition, and she seemed to have written in all seriousness; so next day he went over to Castle Dorington to put matters right.

But somehow or other this was not so easy after all. First there was the inevitable talk with her father, who saw so few people that Hazelhatch's visits were rather an event to him; and then, when at last

he proposed a walk round the grounds to Ella, and Mr. Bannerburn urged her compliance, saying the air would do her good, and she was looking ill, as indeed she was, to his astonishment she declined to go.

However, her cowardice was not destined to prevail, for, before she could escape from the room, her father, pleading an article he wished to finish before post-time, was gone, and she was left alone with the man she loved and was determined to give up.

"What does this mean, Ella?" said he, taking her letter from his pocket and holding it up.

"It—it means—— Oh! Harry, don't make it harder than I can bear!"

"You don't love me?"

"Did you not read it?"

"Every word; but I don't understand it. You want to be free. Is that it?"

"You are cruel, Harry."

"No; it is you who are cruel, to my thinking. May I ask the reason of this sudden change of mind?"

"I told you. I have been thinking it over."

"And found you didn't like the idea?"

"It would be wrong."

"Since when did you discover that?"

"Do not speak to me in that tone, Harry. If you knew what agony I suffered before I wrote——"

"But why? Nothing has altered. You don't suppose because I have to be civil to a young lady who——"

"Stop! You didn't think I wrote because I was jealous?"

"Not exactly; but——" began Harry, a little confused.

"Not exactly! I thought you knew me better—I thought I knew you better.

No. I believed in you enough not to think you would deceive me. But I will own to you that when people have told me why she was brought here—why she went to Braye—why you rode with her out hunting" (not jealous, poor Ella!)—"I have thought it would be best for you—if you can care for her. She is very rich, is she not?"

"I didn't come here to talk about Miss Feyler's money. She is nothing to me, or to you. What I did come for is to make you put this wonderful composition of yours in the fire—that first, and then give me a kiss, and say you are sorry for having been a naughty little girl."

He put his arm round her waist as he spoke; but she did not turn her face towards him, and no playfulness came into her sad eyes.

"No, Harry. I meant every word of

the letter. We must not think of marrying each other."

"You mean *you* want to be free?"

She paused for a moment. The action of his removing his arm from her waist in sudden passion hurt her almost more than his angry tone.

"Yes."

"Then you *are* free."

No answer. She did not dare to speak again—she did not dare to meet his eyes; for, had any tenderness come into them, she felt she must have thrown herself upon his neck.

"I say you are free, Miss Bannerburn; and, as to all these paltry excuses for your conduct, I take them for what they are worth."

"They are true," she murmured, under her breath.

"As true as you are!" he said, bitterly.

"I was told you were a flirt the other day, and it made me furious. I might have spared my anger."

"You are cruel," she said again.

"A jilted man has a right to speak his mind."

"I have not jilted you. Oh, Harry!"

"Well, I know no other name for it."

"It is for you!"

"As one's nurse used to say when she gave one a black draught, or one's tutor when he caned one—all for your own good! But why, Ella?" Here his bitter tone softened. "Why, in heaven's name, did you lead me on to love you, if you meant this all along?"

"I did not know—you had never told me——"

"Of our poverty?—oh, I forgot! Your doubts as to my being worthy of you date

from that announcement. You are most prudent, Miss Bannerburn!"

"Your taunt is as cruel as it is untrue. You know it is untrue—you know I am not mean!"

"Upon my word, nowadays young ladies seem all one very like another. Well, I suppose, I can only take my dismissal quietly, and go."

The ordeal was terrible—even worse than she had anticipated—to lose him for ever, without one kind word of parting—nay, with words of dislike and contempt; yet she could not trust herself to speak.

He took a few steps towards the door, and then turned:

"Have you nothing more to say, Ella?" His voice was husky, and had she dared to look at him she would have seen tears in his eyes.

"What can I say?"

"You ought to know the formula. What you said to George Newsbury might do. Am I to go without a word?—is it all to end like this?"

If he could only have known the wild longing in her breast to cast herself on the ground at his feet, crying out that she loved him, and only him, that she would die if he left her!

But she stood, still as a statue, with her face turned from him.

"All end like this! Oh, my God! And to think I loved—nay, even now I love—you with all my heart: that only a few days ago you said that you loved me!"

She half turned, but then again averted her face; but her whole body trembled—she held to a chair for support.

"These are, probably, the last words I shall ever say to you, Ella Bannerburn, for your idea of our being 'friends' is absurd.

Let me speak seriously to you once. It may be a very grand thing for you to bring men to your feet, and then to spurn them; it may please your vanity; it may perhaps tickle your sense of humour; but it will have an end. My misery may make you happy now, but, perhaps, the day may come when its recollection will be misery —will be shame—to you. Good-bye!"

Two steps, then the door shut, then she heard his footfall on the stairs, and then the noise of the gravel crunched under the wheels of his dog-cart.

And then crying, "God help me! God help me! it has broken my heart!" she fell forward on the floor in the abandonment of utter despair.

And there, an hour later, her father found her, her brown hair all about the carpet, her eyes dimmed with pain, and her lips quivering.

"I love him, father," she said, as he raised her up. "I love him, and—and—it can never be."

"To love is to be miserable, darling," said the philosopher, bending over the chair in which he had placed her. "I loved once, and it nearly killed me."

"But you love me?"

"You are yourself, Ella; there is no woman like you."

"I will never bring you pain, father."

"I hope not, child. Remember the watchword, 'Honour, truth, and justice.' That is all—there is no room for love."

"Or for mercy?"

"No. Mercy is only another name for dishonour. I would cast off even you, child, did you transgress the Code. But tell me, my little one; I shall not live for ever, and you will be but badly provided for at my death; for, as you know, your

cousin gets my property here, such as it is. Why can it 'never be'? He is a very nice young fellow—a gentleman—and though, of course, the Brayes are nothing in point of antiquity to the Bannerburns, still their position is very respectable, and altogether I should——"

"Stop, papa dear; do not say any more about it, and believe me it is impossible. I will tell you why, some day."

And she escaped to her room, leaving Mr. Bannerburn to the congenial task of ferreting out a very weak link in the chain which bound the Brayes of Braye to the Brayes of Ashley Conyngton—a family which, after all, he said, could not get further back than Edward III.

To find a missing link in his pedigree was Mr. Bannerburn's usual revenge on anyone who had offended him.

CHAPTER XIV.

A RUN AND NEARLY A KILL.

A RUN with the Foxshire hounds! Who shall venture to trench upon the ground hitherto occupied by such writers as "Nimrod"—in his one inimitable essay—by Whyte-Melville, and, perhaps, by Laurence. To them we might also add a gallant soldier, who had done but little with his pen before he described brilliantly a brilliant thing over high Leicestershire, in which he would, no matter on what horse, himself have held worthy place. Poor Kit Pemberton! That chance bullet found a billet in a

brain that had never harboured an unworthy thought; and it is sad to think that a soldier, who would, had opportunity served, have done well for his country amid the clash of arms, should have fallen for no better cause than the reporting of the scenes of war in a daily newspaper.

But we are writing of Foxshire.

Egglesby Gorse, as every hunting man knows, is situate on the side of Egglesby Hill, behind which hill, about two miles off, is the dark and dreary wood of Clanton—a wood which enthusiastic sportsmen, unmindful of the necessary if unamusing cub-hunting, would fain see eliminated from the face of the earth. Of course Clanton Wood made Egglesby Gorse anything but a good draw; for, let the field scatter themselves as they might on the top of the hill, the fox, who naturally preferred his safety to their enjoyment, merely took a

détour, and invariably managed to save his brush in the recesses of the hated wood, where every ride was a veritable slough of despond. There was, indeed, a tradition in the county of a very smart stranger, who had come from Manchester, full of his doings with Mr. Reginald Corbet and Sir Watkin, to try conclusions with the men of Foxshire, having once ridden boldly into the wood with the hounds late on a December afternoon, and never having been heard of more. But as the gentleman was evidently possessed of money, and as no heir turned up to explore the wood, it is to be presumed the tale was apocryphal.

Well, a few days after the interview between our lovers, George Newsbury very reluctantly told the huntsman, after a ringing run which had brought them close to Clanton, to trot on and draw Egglesby. Although there was no other covert at a

convenient distance, the grumblers were loud in their complaints.

"Not a chance of a run, just back into Clanton, as usual, and then up and down Clanton till dark—I shall go home," said one.

"Better stay and see which way the fox does go," said Newsbury, overhearing the remark. "It don't follow he will go to Clanton."

"Never does anything else."

"Oh, yes!" put in Hazelhatch. "I remember a goodish gallop to Weevely some years ago; there was no scent, so it was slow; but the line was beautiful."

"It's about the finest bit of country in all Foxshire, sound grass all the way, and good fair fences," said an old sportsman.

"Some big ones though," remarked a young one, who, not being able to plead age as an excuse for shirking, rather dif-

fered with the veteran as to what "fair fences" consisted of. There is no one who recks so little of the magnitude of fences as the man who has ceased to ride over them. The being able to funk while glowing with retrospective heroism must be uncommon agreeable.

"They've found!" said Hazelhatch, as Victor's voice was heard in the gorse.

"Come away, you——fool!" roared the master, to an impetuous veterinary surgeon, who had managed to select for a canter the very field the fox must enter should he take the right line.

The rest of the field spread themselves into a long line on the Clanton side of the covert; but this manœuvre had been resorted to so often that they have but little faith in it. The young sportsman who respects big fences lights a cigar. Newsbury, whose nerve is not quite what it was,

and who likes to be on the safe side, takes a stealthy pull at his flask, having, by virtue of his official position, got round a corner of the covert so to do.

The huntsman's cheery voice echoes in the air, and soon there is a general chorus from the hounds as they race the fox from one side of the gorse to the other.

Then there is a pause.

"Why, they've killed him!" says one.

"Lost him!" from another.

Wrong, both. What is that cantering leisurely across the field where the vet. was so lately disporting himself? The fox, by all that is lucky!

Not a word—not a whisper; they all almost hold their breath as they watch him. He comes to the first fence—a high, straggling hedge. Now is the critical moment; he will turn, and be back in the gorse, or

on his way to Clanton Wood, before the hounds are out of covert. No! he slips through, with the resolution of a fox that has an appointment, and means to keep it.

Then the "Tallyho!" that is sent up into the murky sky; the scurrying and hustling to get down to the corner gate; the entreaties and objurgations of the huntsman to be allowed to get at least five couple of hounds away; the tootling between whiles on his horn; the cracking of the whips' thongs! It seems a veritable Pandemonium for a few moments, till about three-quarters of the pack are out, and on the line, and are running, almost mute, over the firm pasture-land with a breast-high scent.

"Weevely again for a million!" shouts Hazelhatch, in ecstasies, nursing his horse a little as they top a stiffish hill.

But Jack Stubb calls to mind a drain which he remembers some fifteen years ago having been unstopped, and thus having lost him a run, and does not feel quite happy even yet.

They pass it safely, though—a flock of sheep scarcely gives them a minute's check, a check not very unwelcome to some of the horsemen, who would willingly have had it longer—and on they sweep, Jack's "Forard, forard!" which he cries from habit, being certainly unnecessary on this occasion.

Of about seven men, including the huntsmen, who are riding more *to* the hounds than after them, Hazelhatch is going by no means the worst; and, wonderful to relate, not very far behind the first flight, with her eyes fixed on his lordship's back, is Miss Evelyn Feyler, who is to-day for the first time trying what good

riding and pluck will do towards gaining the object she has in view.

She had a magnificent seat and good hands, plenty of nerve, and a determination to succeed. Only practice would make her the equal across a country of Ella Bannerburn, and that practice she was determined to have. This much she had in her favour, too, that her father grudged no price for a horse that was warranted fit to carry her, while her rival was mounted on steeds which, though good enough, were not to be compared with the thoroughbred bits of perfection Mr. Feyler was always ready to give five or six hundred guineas for.

And to-day Evelyn was on her best horse, while Ella had gone home early in the day in consequence of her horse falling lame.

It all seemed very easy at first; wher-

ever Hazelhatch jumped a fence, there she directed her steed, who fenced in perfect style.

"I wish I'd known this was all one had to do," she said, mentally, "I'd have begun to ride long ago."

The only thing that annoyed her was he never looked back, and that therefore to some extent her feats would be unknown to him. To be sure, her being up at the end would prove her prowess, and there were plenty behind her, no doubt, to sing praises of her performance. By the way, when was the end coming? They seemed to have been galloping a long time, and it certainly appeared to her that Florian was not jumping quite as nimbly over the fences as he had done at first. She hated the huntsman's endless "Forard, forard!" which she connected in her mind with the perseverance of hounds and fox; for the

disagreeable knowledge came over her that she was getting most unbecomingly hot, that in that last hedge her nose had been scratched, and that her hair was most decidedly coming down—not coming down nicely, as hair does on the stage, but in a piecemeal and scrappy manner, which suits no style of beauty. And yet those odious hounds would fly on; still Hazelhatch and the others jumped fence after fence, as if that was their sole mission in life. It is some relief to her when they get into a road, along which they gallop for about a mile, turning then into a sort of small park, out of which they emerge over a stiffish flight of rails, which Florian hits hard, sending poor Evelyn nearly off his back; and then she recognizes the fact that she has no longer either hounds or Hazelhatch in front of her.

"Where are they?" she asks, breathless-

ly of a hard-riding squire, who had been admiring her riding hugely.

"There, coming up behind that hill; you'll see them in a second. We've come round to avoid those new double rails, and I thought they'd have been on; but they must have checked in that field. Here they come! By Jove, Harry's going to have them!"

Now everyone except Hazelhatch had remembered that the farmer on whose land they were had but lately erected a most formidable fence to separate his farm from the road—a double post and rails, farther apart than is usual, with the addition of a deep-cut drain on the side away from the road. Taken either way, it was a serious thing to get over; but perhaps into the road, as Hazelhatch must have it, was the worst. Add to its other difficulties the fact that they had been going a

racing pace for about thirty-seven minutes, and you will admit that the odds against his escaping a fall were pretty long. The field, reduced now to very moderate dimensions, sat still on their panting horses and watched him, as he steadied his horse artistically, and rode him straight down at the rails. And Evelyn, who seldom admired anything but herself, was stirred by the masculine beauty and grace which the pair, horse and rider, presented. There was no thought of refusing about either of them; it had to be done, and should be done, if possible. As steady as a rock he sat on his horse as he collected himself for the spring. Then they rose together in the air—there was a second of breathless excitement for the lookers-on, then a crash, and horse and rider rolled over in the road in that terrible confusion that so often means a serious fall. When the

horse struggled up, he rose alone, for his master remained prone, pale, and motionless upon the road.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. GRANVILLE HEREWARD.

MR. GRANVILLE HEREWARD was a very clever young man. Even those who did not like him, or particularly admire his peculiar talents, admitted so much. And, besides his natural shrewdness and ability, he possessed that industry which is the keystone of success. When Mr. Gideon Solomon Hart—who called himself a "financial agent," and about whom, when he was engaged in recovering sums of money generously lent to youths (generally under the age of twenty-one) in distress, cruelly severe remarks had been

frequently made by eminent judges—was gathered to his fathers, young Moses Granville Hart was a very young man. But he was old enough to know that, notwithstanding "Daniel Deronda," and our gradual enlightenment as to the high virtues of the chosen people, there existed a prejudice against the race of Israel in Society; and it is the business of a clever young man, determined to get on in the world, to respect all prejudices, no matter how ill-founded. How he came to possess so Christian a name as Granville matters little; his father may, perhaps, have thrown it in as a sop to these prejudices; at any rate, it showed him his best course, and, on attaining his majority, he caused the insertion in several newspapers of a modest announcement to the effect that he would henceforward be known by the style and title of Hereward. There had been

an unfortunate sportsman, one of the class whose

> "Fathers allow them three hundred a year,
> While they'll lay you a thousand to ten,"

who had come to old Mr. Hart for assistance in satisfying the gentlemen at Tattersall's on settling day; and this assistance had resulted in the transfer of this sportsman's small patrimony—an estate called Hereward Hill, in Dorsetshire—to the possession of Mr. Hart, the whilom owner terminating his career by blowing his brains out with a pistol bought with his last sovereign. So young Granville had no difficulty in providing himself with a name; and, although he did not dare to show himself at Hereward's Hill yet, he looked forward to some day going there as the natural and correct owner of the soil.

With keen brains, with all the shrewdness of his race, with determined ambition,

and with a sum of twenty thousand pounds at his bankers', he thought it would be hard indeed if he could not climb the ladder at the top of which he observed so many dolts and fools; but he began badly. His first venture turned out a disastrous failure, and of his fortune there only remained some five thousand pounds with which to conquer fate. Even that sum, skilfully laid out at from thirty to sixty per cent., will do wonders; and, thanks to his dead parents, Hereward was up to every move in the money-lending game. But, social as well as pecuniary success being his aim, he discarded the idea at once. What should he be? A shop would not do; and the wine trade was full. A stockbroker? Yes; that was it. A *fashionable* stockbroker—what we may call a West End City-man, with a turn for theatres and racing; perhaps a horse or two at Leighton

Buzzard or Rugby, and a neat T-cart to drive down to Richmond or the Orleans Club in a summer afternoon. But how was it to be done? Despite a slight prominence of nose, he was decidedly handsome; his eyes were most expressive, and his manners, thanks to careful observation, good enough to pass muster. This latter faculty, too, stood him in good stead, as far as dress was concerned; and he had early learned to discard the excess of ornament and pomatum which was considered the right thing among his father's friends. He had taken to heart Lord Lytton's wise maxim that it is better for people to say of you, "What a gentleman-like man!" than "What a well-dressed man!" and the fit of his coat and the pattern of his trousers were really worthy of respectful admiration. A black moustache, twisted to two sharp points, gave him the

military air absolutely required—as he said to himself—by the ladies in these martial days; and his hands and feet were as small and exquisitely covered as those of a professional beauty.

But even all these advantages would not get out of the sum of five thousand pounds sufficient to do all he contemplated. Then he made a bold stroke: he spent nearly all that money in one year. He took a stall at the Opera; he drove a T-cart in the park; he lent the impecunious but influential Lord Blank five hundred pounds at $4\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., with no better security than his lordship's well-known and hardly respected note of hand, and was by him, somehow or other, pitchforked into the New Polo and Cricket Club at Kensington, a club with a committee composed of nobles. Then he did little kindnesses for the young men whose ac-

quaintance he made there; asked them to exquisite dinners at Richmond, to meet the fair ones whom no amount of watching at stage-doors had hitherto subdued; put them on "good things" in the City; nay, even sometimes managed to find out a bit of intended roguery, and enabled them to get on a "good thing" on the Turf. Wherever he went he had his eyes and ears open, and never lost the chance of making a new acquaintance; once made, if an indefatigable wish to serve could do it, the acquaintance was turned into a friend.

"Who the deuce is this Hereward?" asked some.

"Oh! I don't know—looks like a Jew—devilish useful fellow, though. I'm going to dine with him at the 'Star and Garter' next Sunday, to meet Kitty Carson."

Or—

"Anyone know anything of that fellow Blank had with him at the New Club yesterday?"

"Stockbroker, I fancy—good-looking fellow, and not half a bad sort. He put me on Patagonians the other day, and they rose to 78 at once."

But notwithstanding his success with men of a certain sort, Hereward clearly saw that he had not even got a firm hold of the fringe of "Society" yet; and he also saw that something more than all this was necessary for him to get that hold. It was easy to find those who would take: what he wanted was a few who would and could give in exchange. He was quite aware that if he had asked young Lord Darlingford, with whom he was so intimate at the *petits soupers* he arranged for that gay Life Guardsman, to introduce him to his mother and sisters, his lordship would have

stared in astonishment at his presumption.

"The women are the thing," he thought, "and how to tackle them? It oughtn't to be difficult, if I could only but begin."

Then there was the vital question of funds. The money he was now spending would no doubt procure him credit for another year or so; but Hereward looked further ahead of him than this.

At last, when, with many fast youths and men about town, who like to know everything and everybody, he had certainly attained a reputation for cleverness, obligingness, and good fellowship, he met Mr. Octavius Feyler.

He called on him on behalf of one of his—Hereward's—father's friends, who wished to push a company, and Mr. Feyler, whose success was partly in consequence of his quick reading of men of this sort, at once saw that the young fellow had it

in him to be useful. The company was floated, Mr. Feyler figured as a director, which in itself precluded failure, and Hereward was appointed secretary. But, besides this, he was also appointed to another unofficial post, that of Mr. Feyler's jackal.

This latter place became soon so important to him, so many delicate matters had he to arrange, and so delicately and skilfully did he arrange them, that the Company secretaryship was abandoned, and he gave himself up entirely to the more congenial profession.

Thus he and Evelyn were thrown much together during her holidays, when she came back with Miss Grandy's prizes and commendations thick upon her; and Mr. Feyler made *coup* after *coup*, and grew richer and richer, mainly in consequence of Hereward's unceasing activity, and readiness to do any dirty work that might

be required of him, and his utter want of all scruples. He set up for himself, too, as a stockbroker; and, although his five thousand had gone in the effort to enter "Society," there was money to be made now, and he had small fear on that score, as long as he could be behind the scenes with his patron.

Of course all this somewhat disturbed the plans as to social success; but it only, to his thinking, deferred them a little. There was Evelyn—a grand possibility; there was Mr. Feyler's will—another grand possibility; and there was the certainty that each day added to his growing fame as a "smart" man, certain to get on, and make a fortune in the City.

Mr. Feyler, too, was about, as he saw, to push open those frowning gates—gigantic impostures—which are opened so easily with every golden key, and there would be

little fear but that Hereward could slip through with him when he entered.

Another fact. Mr. Feyler was not quite so clever, even financially, as he supposed himself; and his *protégé* was a good deal cleverer than he supposed him to be. He little thought how often, when holding forth to his secretary on his schemes for adding thousands to his store, that he was in truth only doing that useless feat vulgarly termed "teaching his grandmother to suck eggs," and his natural vanity prevented his clearly seeing how all his great *coups* of late had been conceived originally by the youth to whom he was teaching nineteenth-century finance.

Now and then, certainly, Hereward rather startled his patron by his boldness and unscrupulousness; but when, his objections having been overcome, the venture "turn-

ed up trumps," the first fears were entirely forgotten, and Mr. Feyler patted himself on the back for his sagacity.

There were two things, however, that the millionaire did not like about his young friend. He suspected him of making love to Evelyn, and he had fathomed his plan of rising, socially, with the Feyler family. Mr. Feyler saw clearly that, once launched, Hereward, with his good looks and good manners, and his ready tongue, might easily pass even himself in social success, and the thought made him jealous. He affected to consider the youth vulgar, envying him the while his gentility, and kept him as much as possible in the background. He would not have had him at Stanesby at all, were it not necessary to consult him on business matters, and he was determined to do all that was possible

to keep him from an intimate acquaintanceship with the big folk of Foxshire.

Evelyn, who, to do her justice, had a sincere contempt for meanness, resented this most warmly, and thereby confirmed her father's impression as to Hereward's scheme concerning her—that is to say, as far as that gentleman's conduct and aims were concerned. That Evelyn, after all she had learned from him and from Miss Grandy (of whose oppressive gentility Mr. Feyler, be it confessed, was terribly afraid), would throw herself away on a nobody, he did not believe; but he was inclined to resent the audacity of the bare thought on Hereward's part: and determined, until the Hazelhatch scheme had come to a head, to keep the other as much as possible in London, contenting himself with daily letters and telegrams on business from him.

But we have left the poor viscount too long lying on the road. Courtesy, if not humanity, obliges an instant return to him.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONVALESCENCE AND CONSPIRACY.

TO turn head over heels in company with your horse on to a hard road is not a thing to be done with impunity, and for a short time those surrounding Hazelhatch were a good deal alarmed as to the extent of his injuries. Of course the ubiquitous doctor soon turned up, and did all that was possible to bring him to his senses, a process that took some time. When he opened his eyes at last, he recognized no one, and seemed quite in the dark as to his position. He got up, though, and thus

showed, at least, that no bones were broken.

"Concussion," said the doctor, "concussion. We must get him home as soon as possible, put him in bed, and he'll be well again in a week."

Some one went for a carriage, while Hazelhatch was set down upon a milestone and his head bathed with some water procured from a cottage hard by. Evelyn had never moved her horse from where he stood when she pulled up to see the jump, and when the fall took place her heart almost stood still. Was she to lose it all like this? Was he killed, and with him her hopes of being Lady Lorton? That was her first thought, and then suddenly, for the first time, it came upon her that she liked this cheery, good-looking man; that his death would be a grief to her for other than such reasons—not so

great a grief, but still decidedly one. And then she heard that he was not killed, and, jumping off her horse, she pressed through the knot of people round him to see him close. Now it so happened that one of her weaknesses, perhaps we might say her sole weakness, was a morbid horror of the sight of blood. A cut finger made her sick and faint, so it was no great wonder that when she caught sight of Hazelhatch's visage, which was plentifully bedaubed with blood from a cut on his forehead, she, excited and tired by the run and the accident, immediately proceeded to faint clean away. An application of some of the water brought for Hazelhatch, however, soon brought her to again, and by that time his face had been made comparatively clean, so that she had no occasion to repeat the performance.

Until the carriage came he sat on the

milestone; and when it did come, still in that curious state of lethargy sometimes produced by concussion, he was driven, well supported by cushions, home to Braye.

It did not become Evelyn, as a young lady only recently acquainted with him, to betray any very exaggerated feeling about him; but her sympathy was very properly and suitably done; and more than one of the red-coated men around her, when she gave the finishing touch to the position of the cushion that was to support his head, thought that to have your cushions arranged through life by such gentle little hands would be far from unpleasant.

Of course there was great excitement at Braye House when the patient arrived, and all got much in the way in their anxiety to do something towards helping. Lord Lorton, who was sincerely attached

to his son, showed much more presence of mind than his wife, whose loud prognostications of a sorrowful ending were rather trying to all their nerves and tempers.

"It's all that horrid hunting," she cried, between her sobs. "Oh, Lorton! I do wish you and Harry would give it up—and you know you can't afford it."

As the doctor and a maid were in the room, Lord Lorton felt that his wife's absence, in her then frame of mind, was desirable, and despatched her to hunt for some charpie which had been picked by them in the evenings during the Franco-German war, and which was as much required by Hazelhatch as a tourniquet.

"He's had a bad blow on the head," said the surgeon from Foxborough next day, "but I don't think it will be very serious."

It was very serious, nevertheless; and, though in a few days the absolute confu-

sion in his mind departed, there remained a good deal of pain, and a something which no one could quite define, and which, indeed, they shrank instinctively from mentioning the one to the other. He seemed to forget things too easily, and to be unduly nervous. Altogether it came to be pretty well understood in the county that the fall had shaken him a good deal.

"Not what he was," they said. "Head won't ever be quite the same again. What a pity!"

Of course all this was exaggerated. He was only feeling the very natural effects of a serious concussion of the brain, and would be as well as ever before long. In the meantime, however, he lay weak and dispirited, not quite in a fit state to be very firm on any subject.

Yet firmness was just what was wanted. About a week after his fall a large creditor

of Lord Lorton had actually—after having used every other means to get his money—had actually commenced an action; and Mr. Graines had been obliged to tell his lordship that, unless the money was found at once—and he, Mr. Graines, could not find it—the consequence would be publicity, and publicity meant ruin.

At this crisis Mr. Feyler came over to Braye House to inquire after the invalid, having up to that time sent a servant every day for the same purpose, and Lord Lorton told him the whole story.

The ease with which he had obtained the former loan—for that affair had been satisfactorily arranged—emboldened him, and made the thing far easier; for in borrowing, as in most things, *ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte;* but Mr. Feyler's manner was not quite the same as on the first occasion.

"It's a big sum, my lord."

"Well," said his lordship, airily, "that depends how you look at it. To you, Feyler, I should say it was not a very big sum."

The rich man liked the absence of the "Mister" before his name, and looked a little less business-like and stern.

"Well, you see, Lorton——"

The other winced, but smiled quickly as he met his friend's eye.

"You see, Lorton, money goes up and down—like—like——"

"The sea—omnibuses," suggested Lord Lorton, as he paused for a word.

"Like other commodities. Just now money is dear."

"Just what I told my mortgagee—the unconscionable ruffian!"

"But, dear or cheap, I think I can generally command a fair share of it,

Lorton," said Mr. Feyler, pompously.

"The finest command in the world!" exclaimed Lord Lorton, rapturously.

"And I am always willing to oblige an intimate friend—or a relation," he added, with emphasis.

"Ah, yes, exactly."

"You see, my lord," went on the capitalist, bringing his hand down heavily on the other's knee, a proceeding which that other fiercely but silently resented; "I'm a plain mercantile man, and I hate beating about the bush. As I said to you, I am always ready to oblige an intimate friend or a relation. Now our ranks differ so much that it is almost impossible for us to be one without the other."

"Eh?" said his lordship, puzzled.

"I mean we can scarcely be very intimate friends without being relations too. I'll be plain-spoken, Lorton. If you

don't like it, well, as we used to say at school—no offence meant—you must lump it. You and I, each of us, want something. You may think it strange for me, in my position, to want anything; but I do. Not for myself. *I've* got all I want; but there's that girl. I want something for her. I want blood."

He uttered this sanguinary wish in a tone that imparted to it an awful solemnity. Even Lord Lorton was too much impressed by the savage desire to speak.

"I want blood—breeding—title—old family—etcetera; and you want money. Money nowadays is worth a good deal the most in the market; but I can afford to give a fancy price for a fancy article. Do we understand each other, my—Lorton?"

"I think I understand this much: that, should our two children happily become attached to one another, we will throw no

obstacle in the way of their—of their being as attached as they choose."

"More than that," said Mr. Feyler, again raising an inward fury in his companion's breast by another slap of his knee; "more than that. My girl's ready enough; I'll answer for her. Not that she mightn't do better after a season in London, and that sort of thing; but—well, I'm content with this. I say I'll answer for her. Do you settle it with your son. Give me your word to do this, and I'll take this mortgage myself, not minding about the arrears of interest. I suppose there are arrears of interest? More than that: the day it's settled I'll pay off and take myself all the mortgages on your estates. Is it a bargain, my lord?"

Lord Lorton hesitated for a moment, half inclined to kick over his own scheme, and order the man out of his house; but prudence prevailed.

"You are very generous, Feyler, very! This foreclosure would have been very serious to me—exceedingly so. And as to the young people, from what I have seen, they will not require much prompting."

"There's no truth, then, in the stories about him and that girl, daughter of the old pauper at Castle Dorington who calls himself a lord—I forget the name?"

"Mr. Bannerburn," said Lord Lorton, as stiffly as he dared, "the representative of the oldest family in Foxshire, and a great friend of my own. No, I don't think there is any truth in such stories. I did not know they were told. But people in a dull county must invent flirtations if people won't perpetrate 'em."

After some further conversation the interview ended. The irate mortgagee was replaced by Mr. Feyler, who took one

half per cent. less interest, and Lord Lorton was bound body and soul to the plot.

Of course he told his wife, who, after much advice from him as to her conduct, aided the cause with more tact than she usually evinced, bringing in Evelyn's name accidentally, as it were, not too often, in the conversation of the sick-room, but managing so that Hazelhatch should never be long without hearing something of her, and that he should be much impressed with the concern she took in his recovery.

"Who else has been sending over to inquire?" he asked one day.

"Oh—everyone at first. The Disdales sent—fancy!—sixteen miles; but latterly, of course, not so many. You are going to be quite well soon now, dear," she went on, stooping down and kissing his forehead.

"If I did not—not feel so confused—

as if something inside my head was loose—I should be nearly all right, for the bruises are nothing. Don't the Bannerburns ever send?"

"Oh, yes—they sent the first day—and the second, I think, and Mr. Bannerburn called once—yesterday or the day before. What a disagreeable man he is!"

"He came alone?" said Hazelhatch, a slight flush, which his mother marked, on his pale cheek.

"Yes—alone."

"And brought no message from—from anyone?"

"Oh, yes; he brought messages from the Manistys, saying how glad they were you are getting well."

"Oh!" said Hazelhatch; and then, crossly, "You can leave me alone a little now, mother. I think I could sleep a bit."

Now the truth was that Ella had written a letter to him—a letter which she was actually finishing when her father came into her room one day.

"You are writing to him, Ella?"

"Yes, father."

"Though it can never be?"

"Yes."

"Is that right?—is it maidenly?"

"Is it the reverse?"

"Yes. My child, you must not send it."

"Oh, father," she cried, clasping her hands, "it is only to tell him how I thank God for preserving him—to tell him——"

"What is he to you if 'it can never be'?" he asked, quoting her words again. "Do you think I am going to allow my daughter to write words of love—well, are they not words of love?"—(this in reply to a deprecatory gesture on her part)—"to a man she can never marry? You

are a Bannerburn, Ella, always remember that; and you are a woman, too. Is it the fashion nowadays for the women to take the initiative?"

It was useless to argue with him when he took this tone; he was seldom bitter to his child, and when he was so it hurt her.

She looked once at her letter, once at his stern face, and then put what it had cost her much to write into the flames.

So Hazelhatch only got the message from the Manistys, and Lady Lorton scored another point in the game.

"She might have shown some sign of caring," he thought to himself. "I was right. She is a flirt, after all."

When he had still further recovered, and was able to sit on a sofa downstairs, many visitors came to see him, and amongst others Miss Newsbury, who amused him for some time by her accounts

of the proceedings of the neighbours, of the latest scandals from London, and of all the tittle-tattle which a woman who writes and receives about a dozen gossiping letters *per diem* can collect.

At length she said, just as she was about to go—

"Any more news? No. I think I've done pretty well in that line already. My domestic affairs wouldn't amuse you much."

"Why, are you going to be married?" asked he, with a smile which, although she always joined in the laugh against her for her certain old maidhood, she inwardly resented.

"No; not just yet. It's a bad plan to do that too early in life. No; but I think George soon will be."

"Really! To whom? Not Miss Dalmeny?"

"No, no. Guess again! Some one you know very well."

"I really haven't an idea," he exclaimed, with a fierceness that seemed quite unnecessary, "and am a bad hand at guessing—and gossip."

"Oh, I'm so sorry I've bored you with all my gossip—but you must admit you laughed at the story of Mrs. Pardon and her tail."

"Well, who's George going to honour?"

"George?—oh, I'd nearly forgotten. I never said he really was; I only said likely soon to be. He and little Ella Bannerburn had a quarrel the other day about something or other; but it's made up again, and the affair is galloping—in my opinion—racing to the finish. He's gone there to-day; indeed, as I tell him, the amount of work along that road his horses have to

do on non-hunting days will knock them all up."

The truth was that George Newsbury had written a most humble letter to Ella, begging her forgiveness, and had been accorded it on promising never to offend in such a manner again. Then after Hazelhatch's accident he had indeed called very often at Castle Dorington, but only for the purpose of conveying to Ella the latest intelligence of the patient's state, which a servant went over daily from Averley to obtain.

"Well, it will be in a good cause," said Hazelhatch, wondering whether there *could* be truth in this.

"Yes," said Miss Newsbury; "at least I'm not sure that I do think so. I'm afraid she's rather flighty. By the way, how is Miss Feyler?"

"Has she been ill?"

"Oh, I don't believe she has. But after her fainting-fit the other day one can't think her very strong."

"Where did she faint?"

"Why, in the road—didn't they tell you? It must have been a sweet picture. You lying dead, as they all thought, in one ditch, and she lying in a swoon, as the novelists call it, in the other."

And Miss Newsbury laughed. She did not much believe in the reality of this fainting-fit, and was too clever to see that Hazelhatch would believe in it.

Women, however talented, never quite understand the depth of men's ignorance concerning them. They fancy we, like themselves, see the motives as plainly as the actions, quite forgetting that *we* are looking on through the mists of admiration, while *they* are observing the performance through the telescope of malice.

It was rather a pleasant thought for him that the imperious, cold, beautiful Evelyn had actually fainted when she thought him killed, and coming, as it did, immediately after the news about Ella and George Newsbury, did a good deal towards lessening the difficulties of the plotters downstairs.

Soon he was visited by this young lady, accompanied, of course, by her father. She seemed rather shy—no doubt because of the fainting episode—but her sympathy was very pretty, and her description of his riding at the fence a very cleverly paid compliment to himself, his looks, his riding, his courage, and his horse.

"I hear you went like a bird that day," he said.

"I was following you," she replied, blushing.

"It's lucky you didn't follow me alto-

gether. I can't think how I forgot those new rails; the hounds checking made jumping them quite unnecessary. What would you have done if you'd come my way?"

"I think I should have tried to jump them too."

"And probably have got over. I ought to have. It's nothing of a place."

"I'm sure no one could have ridden at it better," she cried, as if almost carried away by the recollection.

She subsided into silence, and let her father do all the rest of the talking. When she had gone, Hazelhatch missed her splendid eyes, as you feel the extinction of a light; and could not but tell himself that she had left her hand in his at least five seconds longer than is usual in the ordinary salutation.

Before he was recovered enough to go

out, and when he was still weak from the effects of the accident and from confinement to the house, Lord Lorton confided to him the transaction as regarded the foreclosing mortgagee.

"That's a second loan, is it not?" he asked.

"Yes; a second. You see, Mr. Feyler wishes to invest a large sum in land."

"If he did, he'd buy it."

"So he has—plenty. But mortgages are capital security."

"This one isn't, as the late mortgagee found out. You seem to be determined to owe this man an enormous sum."

"It's always a good thing to consolidate your debts. Much better to owe a lot to Feyler than to a quantity of unknown people."

"Why does he do it? that's what puzzles me."

"I think——"

"Well?"

"He has a regard for the family."

"Why?"

"My dear boy, how should I know? Perhaps he hopes that he may become connected with it. More unlikely things have happened, you know," and his lordship escaped hastily, not quite liking the look of his son's eyes.

Yes, more unlikely things *had* happened, that son said to himself. Was it a case of buying and selling, after all? If they would suit each other, was the fact of her wealth to stand in the way? Surely not; and yet—Ella?

CHAPTER XVII.

HAZELHATCH WRITES TO ELLA.

WHEN a weak man is about to do a thing which his conscience tells him is wrong, he usually makes an attempt to put the blame of the action upon some one else's shoulders, as if his conscience could be so hoodwinked. Hazelhatch, although he could be firm enough in some matters, was, it must be confessed, weak where women were concerned; and the assaults upon his firmness, made while he was further enfeebled by the effects of his accident, had been very persistent and

powerful. So he sat down and wrote a letter.

"DEAREST ELLA,

"Since that dreadful day when we parted, I have thought a great deal over what you said. I was unjust to you then, Ella—forgive me; but the pain of hearing what you said was very great. I know you too well to think you *could* have an unworthy motive for anything you might do. Yet were you right? In the world is money of such importance, after all? If we love each other, should not that suffice? I may be a conceited fool, but, despite your casting me off, I believe you do love me, dear, and, if so, why should we not yet be happy? I will be frank with you. My family are very eager for me to marry Miss Feyler. She is a woman any man might be proud to call his wife;

she is worthy of being your friend, Ella; what greater praise could I give her? As you know, her father is very rich, and he has promised to make such arrangements, should the marriage take place, as would quite free my father from his embarrassments. Do not suppose, however, that I am in the least committed.

"All this I have learned more or less by accident; nothing has been directly told me, although, of course, no one knows of anything between you and me. Ella, dear, I love you, and you only. I would a million times prefer any poverty with you to any riches with another woman. Unsay what you said the other day; write me one little line of love, and I will fly to your feet. I will give up my life to making you happy, and in doing so I shall gain the greatest happiness possible to a man. I feel that I am on the brink of a

precipice. Put out your little hand and save me. Only one little word—'I love you, come to me'—just write that, and I shall be yours for ever. Without you I care little what may happen. Without you nothing would be more important to me than obliging my family in this matter. But you will save me, will you not? If you care for me—love me as I love you—you will write. Remember that, if you do not, the consequences will be partly your fault. I will not take what you said at Castle Dorington as final; only your silence now would be so, for it would show me that I was mistaken in thinking that you really loved me."

It has been said that when a woman discovers that her idol has feet of clay she usually adores it more than ever; and Ella's feeling of natural contempt for the

weak and unmanly pleading of this letter did not diminish by one jot or tittle her affection for its concocter. She had a larger way of looking at things than most women have; and she understood clearly enough how those around him had taken advantage of his illness to impress him with the imagined duty that lay before him. Besides this, she had conceived a great admiration for Evelyn Feyler, such as one generous-minded woman can conceive for another, and she did honestly believe that young lady would make him a worthy wife. That Hazelhatch should marry for money was very—horribly—distasteful to her; but, if it was necessary that he should do so, surely it was scarcely possible he could do better than marry this dignified, lady-like beauty.

And Ella did not deceive herself. She knew well enough that, quite apart from

the heiress's wealth, Harry was taken by her beauty and charm.

Over and over again she read her lover's letter, and over and over again did her tears—tears of great bitterness of heart—fall upon the paper.

Then, although she had in reality made up her mind as to her course, she put on her hat and walked over to the rectory to consult her old friend, the Reverend James Manisty, her chaperon out hunting, and one of the best parsons and keenest sportsmen in the county.

"Of course," as she said to herself impatiently, there was Bob, the son, idling about outside the front-door, engaged in attempting to teach an old pointer to fetch a stick—a proceeding the dog resented as quite contrary to the etiquette of his profession.

"Oh, Ella, you're over early to-day.

How d'ye do? Come and see the new foal —such a little beauty!"

"No, thanks, Bob——where's your father?"

"At his sermon, I fancy; at least the notice is on his door."

This alluded to a piece of cardboard with the words, "No admittance unless the house is on fire or the hounds coming by," written thereon, by means of which the poor rector attempted to defend himself from his family during his hours of work.

"I think he'll see me though," said Ella.

"See you! Why, I believe he'd keep us without a sermon for a month rather than not see you. Do you know, I'm very jealous of the rector, Ella?"

"Don't be stupid, Bob," was Ella's only reply to this effort of gallantry.

"Oh, but I am though—and as to my mother, she——"

"Bob, I've told you twenty times I don't care for that kind of nonsense. How is Mrs. Manisty?"

"Oh, she's pretty well."

"And your sisters?—are they out?"

"Yes; gone for a walk down the Foxborough Road. By a curious coincidence the cavalry detachment from that city takes a march on that very road at this very time."

"I'm ashamed of you, sir! Go and ask your father if he'll come and speak to me in the drawing-room." And Ella went through the door the boy held open for her, and entered the house.

In a few moments the rector came to her. He was a tall, spare man, with a handsome, weather-beaten face, and a genial manner that took your fancy at first

sight. A man who did his duty according to his lights, fearing no man, not even his bishop, and who of all earthly foibles hated most heartily meanness and cowardice. A man of no great ability, of no deep reading; with scarcely any so-called "knowledge of the world," but endowed with a plentiful amount of native shrewdness and some humour. A kind-hearted, generous friend and neighbour, neither condescending to the poor nor truckling to the rich; a parson who did not approach all subjects from a parsonic standpoint, but who shocked many orthodox persons by what they called his laxity.

"Make a sort of Sunday of each day in the week; it is better than making Sunday so very different from the rest. Why should the Devil have 6 to 1 the best of it?" This, from the pulpit, had horrified some good people, and Mr. Hardley, the

lawyer, had threatened to leave his church in consequence; but the rector appeared not a whit affrighted by this threat.

Such is a slight sketch of the man to whom Ella confided her trouble. He put down Hazelhatch's letter with a pish of contempt.

"I oughtn't to have shown it to you," said Ella; "but I thought he wouldn't mind my asking you."

"It is a letter no man with a particle of manliness in him would have written," said the rector; "it is the letter of a coward."

"Oh, Mr. Manisty, he is not that!"

"Not in some ways, I daresay. Men are not often cowards with each other, but only with women. You have surely no doubt as to what to do, Ella?"

"Scarcely; and yet— Oh, Mr. Manisty, we might have been so happy together!"

"I thought so too. But, after this," and he twisted up Hazelhatch's letter contemptuously, "I doubt it."

"He is weak and ill, and I fancy they have worried him."

"Nonsense, child. He wants you to take half the blame of his mean and wicked action, that's what this letter means. If it breaks your heart—well, so much the worse for you: he will tell himself that he is not to blame."

"I feel," said Ella, in a low and trembling voice, and leaving her hand in her friend's, "I feel that I should be wrong—indeed, I do—to stand in his way."

"He is not worthy to black your boots! Leave him to his heiress, and much good may the ill-gotten money-bags do him! My poor little Ella!" And he stroked her hand affectionately.

"You think I should not write?"

"Yes, write and tell him you despise him."

"Oh, no! for I do not."

"You ought."

"I love him. Oh, Mr. Manisty, I may say it to you, and it is so hard to bear without speaking—I love him so!"

"My poor child—my poor child! But time—and something greater even than time—will console you."

"I have prayed to do right, and I shall always pray for his happiness."

It was not for the rector to say that any prayer for the well-being of another could be wasted, but he thought so, nevertheless.

"I think," said Ella, after a pause, "that I should like to get away for a time if I could, and yet it would be so hard on papa to drag him from his books and papers. He does hate moving so. I

should so like to be away from here till—till the whole thing is over."

"Yes, of course. Exactly what I was going to propose. Well, nothing could have been apter. Mrs. Manisty has been long ago ordered change of air, and I think the same prescription would suit Cornelia. Julia's very fond of the Isle of Wight. Why not go there, then, say next week?"

"Oh, you're very kind, Mr. Manisty; but——"

"No buts! It's settled. Julia'll be delighted."

"But my father?"

"Oh, he has several times spoken to me of late about your looks. Change of air is imperative for you; and if you think he'll be lonely, why, I'll take up my quarters there till you come back, or at least

I'll go over so often that he'll hate the sight of me."

And so it was settled. Hazelhatch waited vainly for an answer to his letter, and at last sent a messenger over with a note.

The answer was that Miss Bannerburn had gone with Mrs. Manisty to Ventnor for a month or so.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE VICTORY OF DIPLOMACY.

THE Foxborough Ball was very like all the other balls of its kind. Those superior persons who went to London, and who therefore might be supposed to know what balls should be, declared that the floor was sticky, the lighting insufficient, the supper atrocious, the champagne homicidal, and the dress and beauty altogether contemptible.

The following of the superior persons—a phalanx who did not go to London, but hoped to do so, and wished to think as if they had done so—echoed their leaders'

sentiments; and, while never missing one of the Foxborough festivals, though many miles of weary road lay between the "George Inn" and their homes, professed a superior disdain for the whole thing, and loudly complained of their martyrdom.

But still there remained a *residuum* of honest pleasure-loving souls, who, delighting in it, were not ashamed to say so; and, strange as it may seem, the foremost of them was the Lord Lieutenant of the County.

Lord Lorton, in his well-fitting red dress-coat, with his white moustache as stiff as a bayonet, was a sight to see, as he flirted, under the very nose of his wife, with every pretty girl he could find; while that wife looked on in admiration, and wondered more and more at her luck in having secured such a paragon.

George Newsbury, too, was very well

worth remarking on these occasions, as by virtue of his position as M.F.H. he was the principal host; and, with his rosette of office in one button-hole and his Averley violets in the other, he did sad havoc in the susceptible bosoms of many fair and unsophisticated maids of Foxshire.

Of course there was a party at Braye House this year, and they were loud in their lamentations at the necessary absence from the ball of Hazelhatch.

"Couldn't you come in a litter?" said one.

"Or a bath-chair?" said another.

"We'll all wheel you about," cried a gushing damsel of forty-eight.

"What a charming idea!" said Hazelhatch. "Fancy the state of my brain—and heart—after being wheeled about all night by hosts of fairies like you, Miss Adjerson."

"Oh, hang it!" said a young gentleman,

"Whose only wish was woman to win,"

"it wouldn't be fair, you know. If you have one bath-chair, Harry, I'll have another, and we'll dance a *pas de deux*. The bath-chair *can-can!* It would take."

"I am so sorry you can't go," said Evelyn Feyler, late in the evening, in a low voice.

"Yes—I should have liked to—to have danced with you, Miss Feyler."

"You couldn't have done that."

"What! would you not have given me one dance?"

"Of course I would; but I'm not going."

"Not going—with such a splendid gown!"

"I did not put it on for the ball, Lord Hazelhatch."

"Didn't you?"

"No. I would rather dress myself for one person I liked than for a thousand I don't care about."

This was rather plain speaking, and Hazelhatch scarcely knew how to reply, except by some *banale* remark. However, she solved the difficulty, (which probably she appreciated), by going on—

"Lady Lorton is to stay at home to amuse you, and I've got leave to stay to amuse *her*. Do you object, Lord Hazelhatch?"

"Object! No. But I feel quite ashamed——"

"You needn't. I really care very little for these affairs; and, you see, we are not —I mean we have not many friends in Foxshire yet. It isn't quite the same delight to me as to Miss Adjerson or Miss Bannerburn."

"Miss Bannerburn has gone to Ventnor."

"Oh, has she?" said Evelyn, carelessly; but her heart leaped for joy.

"I'm not very fond of balls, even when one meets the people one wants to meet. I always think one could meet them so far more pleasantly elsewhere. Then there is always such a conflict in one's mind between choosing the men who *can* dance and *can't* talk, and those who *can* talk and *can't* dance. The two accomplishments are so seldom united."

"I thought we got on capitally at that dance here the other night," said Hazelhatch.

"You mean dancing?"

"Of course. I don't presume to think I could please you the other way,"—this rather huffily.

"Don't you?" said Miss Evelyn; but her

eyes said a great deal more, and effectually disposed of his lordship's huffiness.

"And are you really going to stay and be bored with my mother and myself, instead of going to the gilded saloon of the 'George'?" asked Hazelhatch, in some delight.

She answered the question, in the fashion of Ireland, by another question.

"Isn't it curious how often—at least, I have often found it so—how often duty and inclination go together?"

Then Lady Lorton, in the fussy state the entertainment of many guests always threw her in, came up.

"Isn't it good of her, Harry, determined to stay at home to look after me? And though I must say I think she ought to go to the ball—for there will be none prettier there—yet I can't help being grateful to her, as I should have been very dull, you know."

"That's complimentary to me, mother," said Hazelhatch, laughing.

"Oh! you'd have gone to smoke, and then I should have read some stupid book, and gone to sleep."

Evelyn mentally registered a vow that her staying at home should not, if possible, avert the sleep; but only smiled very sweetly, and pressed Lady Lorton's chubby hand.

"This is a very sudden resolve, this staying at home of yours," said Lady Violet Braye, marching across the room to them.

"All resolves are sudden, Lady Violet," said Evelyn, sweetly still; "at least those that come from impulse."

"Well, I wish you joy of mamma's snores. I suppose you'll go to the smoking-room when we are gone, Harry?"

"You're always supposing, Violet. The

chances are that mother will play the piano, and Miss Feyler and I will valse till the small hours."

"That wouldn't be much more idiotic than our driving ever so many miles to make fools of ourselves at the 'George.' How I hate the whole thing! I've a good mind to stay, too."

Three people trembled in their shoes. Then Lady Lorton, with unusual sagacity, remarked—

"Do, dear. Then we can have a rubber of whist, and I shall enjoy it, as your father won't be here to scold me for not leading trumps."

But Lady Violet—arrayed with a magnificence beyond her years, and looking like a married lady from tha City—had no intention of giving up her ball; indeed, had no fixed intentions at all, except those of being as unpleasant as possible to everyone.

She really revelled in the power her position in Foxshire gave her of being able to say little sharp and snubbing things to her partners without the possibility of this course of conduct bringing on her the retribution it brought in London—namely, no partners to say sharp things to or to snub. Every young man in the county was bound to have one dance at least with Lady Violet Braye, let his feelings and self-conceit be bruised and battered as they might in the unequal encounter.

Soon after this conversation came the immense labour of collecting the party, cloaked and hatted, and despatching them in batches by means of the various carriages at the door. Of course there was the usual scheming to go with this person and to escape that person; the usual young lady whose frock came to grief at the eleventh hour, and who had to be taken away to be

repaired; and the usual young man who had disappeared at the last moment to re-adorn himself, or to get that fresh flower, lurking upstairs in a wine-glass, which would enable him to steal a march upon his less thoughtful rivals.

At last, however, the whole party were safely embarked, Lord Lorton bringing up the rear in a brougham with a fascinating widow on whom he had long cast the eye of admiration; and the trio left behind settled themselves down in the now deserted drawing-room.

Evelyn looked supremely handsome to-night, dressed as she was in the very height of ball-going finery, and it was impossible for Hazelhatch not to be pleased by her renunciation of the triumphs of the evening: for there could be no doubt but that she would have electrified Foxshire.

She had not neglected a point in her

game. Had she informed him in the afternoon of her intention to stay at home, and come down to dinner in an ordinary dinner-gown, it was possible that he might have put down her action to a quarrel with the costume provided for her; now he saw plainly enough that she threw away a victory over hundreds of her natural enemies—her own sex—and for his sake.

And this did have its effect. Hazelhatch was half intoxicated by her beauty, and by the softness she had to-night more than once thrown into her voice and eyes when addressing him; and when, Lady Lorton having settled herself in an easy-chair with a book, Evelyn sang song after song to him while he leant on the piano and looked at her face, he fairly forgot everything except that she was the loveliest woman he had ever seen.

* * * * * *

The piano ceased; the clear young voice ceased, too; there was a silence, through which the music of the last song seemed to vibrate with still deeper meaning, and then a prolonged snore from the chair where Lady Lorton sat.

They both burst out laughing. It seemed such a practical commentary upon their sentimental mood.

"I was up in the clouds," said Hazelhatch, in a low voice, "but that has brought me down to earth again."

"I wish we could always be in the clouds like this," said Evelyn, wondering whether Lady Lorton was a light sleeper.

"It was so good of you to stay at home for me," he said, sitting down on a chair that was close to the music-stool.

"For you? How do you know that?" But, though her words were bantering, her

tone was soft—dangerously soft—and tremulous.

"Am I wrong? Say it was not for me!"

There was a pause, and this time they neither of them had time to laugh at Lady Lorton's snore.

"You always speak the truth, I know. Say so!"

"I can't!"

"Because it would not be true?"

"I suppose so."

His chair was touching the music-stool now. She glanced anxiously at the old lady, and another snore re-assured her.

"You like me?"

"What shall I say, Lord Hazelhatch?"

Oh, if Miss Grandy could have but seen her pupil now, the worthy old maid would have indeed been recompensed for all her toil of educating into gentility. The cast

ing down of the eyes, the trembling of the voice, the blush on the cheek—all were perfect; and yet the head was as cool, and the heart beating as evenly, as if the girl had been ordering dinner.

"Say the truth!"

"Yes, I do like you."

"As you like your dog or your horse?"

"Oh, no—far better."

"As you like—your father—or Mr. Hereward?"

She glanced at his face for a moment when he mentioned the latter name, but her eyes fell again quickly as she met his gaze.

"No—differently. You oughtn't to ask me such things, Lord Hazelhatch—and—and your mother might wake."

He had his arm round her supple waist

now—his lips were close to hers—he was carried away by her beauty—nearer came his lips, closer his arm held her—and then she looked up, and the tenderness of her eyes finished him. Their lips met.

"Do you love me, Evelyn?"

"Yes."

"And will marry me?"

"Yes."

Io triumphe! Victory! Victory! The crown—we ought, perhaps, to say the coronet—of glory is won. Miss Evelyn Feyler, the daughter of the vulgar City man, the love of the money-lender's son, the pupil of Miss Grandy, is to be a Viscountess, in due time a Countess! Snore on, Lady Lorton, snore on in peace. There is no danger of those whisperings, of those hand-claspings, of those lip-meetings in the corner, waking you up. Snore on, and

wake to know that the "eternal fitness of things" is again vindicated, and the House of Braye is saved.

CHAPTER XIX.

EVELYN MARRIES, AND THE AUTHOR MORALIZES.

"Oh, Love! what is it in this world of ours
That makes it fatal to be loved?"

wrote Byron; and if he was right Lady Hazelhatch must have been in a parlous state indeed. For her husband soon worshipped the ground she trod upon, and Ella Bannerburn was to him as if she had never existed. It was the man's nature to love anything that was his own; anything that seemed to demand his loyalty and affection as of right; and he had ideas as

to the relations between husband and wife which scarcely harmonized with the broader views adopted generally in this our "empty day." To trust all in all was obligatory to him; suspicion or uncertainty would have been death to his love, and with that love now would have gone the best part of his life.

And it was impossible for her not to be a little in love with the good-looking, good-tempered man who was at her feet, and to whom, moreover, she owed her rise in the social scale. She understood well enough what the change of manner of those she met meant. Miss Feyler, the heiress, was all very well, but Lady Hazelhatch was something far better. She did not need Miss Grandy's letter of congratulation to know this; though that epistle, accompanied by a wedding present—a charming ormulu work-box, with the

Braye arms thereon in relief—amused her a good deal. Thus it ran:—

"My very dear Pupil,

"I take up my pen with very great pleasure to wish you all happiness in the future. The good news only reached me this evening. I need scarcely tell you that, however much it pleased, it did not surprise me. Your behaviour while finishing your education, and, I hope, acquiring something better than mere knowledge of books, languages, music, &c., with me, always, to my mind, augured your success in that society which you are now about to enter under such noble auspices. That you will do justice to your lofty position I do not doubt; and I trust you will not deem me a self-flatterer when I venture to think that I have had a humble share towards contributing to that consumma-

tion. But, my dear pupil, forgive me for reminding you that there *are* things which neither station nor wealth can give, and for asking you, although the pomps and vanities of the great world—of which you will be an ornament—be ever so engrossing, not to lose sight of the fact that under heaven we are all the same, and all have need of the same assistance. I send you a little *souvenir*. Hide it away in a corner amid your costly gifts, and believe me that by its worthlessness you must not measure the sincerity of its giver's good wishes. Please remember me most kindly to Mr. Feyler, and present my humble respects to the Earl and Countess of Lorton, and, if you will, also to the Viscount Hazelhatch.

"Believe me, my dear Evelyn,

"Your very affectionate friend,

"GERTRUDE GRANDY.

"P.S.—Will you kindly tell me exact date of the marriage, so that I may provide myself with a *Court Journal* of that week?

"P.S. No. 2.—I have forgotten to mention to you—so engrossed am I by a *more important matter*—that your fellow-pupil, Caroline Hellier, who left me at the same time that you did, is about to marry a Mr. Cariton, who, I believe, carries on the profession of a civil engineer. Poor Caroline, good as she undoubtedly was, was wanting in those *nuances* of good manners which it always gave me such pleasure to see in you."

"What snobs we all are!" said Evelyn, half to herself, as she threw down the letter.

"Snobs, dear?" asked the *fiancé*, who happened to over-hear.

"Yes—I mean women; all except me,

of course," she added, smiling up at him. "I'm an exception to every rule just now; but wait a bit."

"I have no fear," said he, stoutly—"no fear at all."

"I am afraid you are a little silly."

"If trust and faith in a good woman are silliness, I hope I may always be silly."

"So do I. I should hate a clever husband; I mean so clever that he saw what was not. Suspiciousness——"

"Suspicion is death to love; jealousy is selfishness gone mad. When I trust, I trust wholly and unreservedly," said Hazelhatch, holding her hand.

"You are too good for me," she sighed; and for once Evelyn Feyler meant what she said.

But she was not Evelyn Feyler long. The bells of the old Hazelhatch church rang merrily, if somewhat discordantly;

the spring sun shone out a happy omen; the spring flowers thrust up their noses and wished the happy pair all good wishes; the villagers bowed and hurraed and got drunk; the county gentry put on their best clothes and flocked to Braye House, where they listened to speeches and admired the bride, and speculated on the fortune she brought, and wondered at the grandeur of Mr. Feyler's attire; Lord Lorton, also beautifully arrayed, said the right thing in the right way to a hundred of the right people. Lady Lorton dropt a tear or two at the correct moment, and wondered what she was crying about, as did those who observed her; George Newsbury gave his friend away, as he termed it, with all due solemnity; the Bishop of the Midlands warned the gaily-attired folk against the folly of the "plaiting of hair," and made a rollicking speech at the breakfast; the

bride caused you to forget her lovely bridal gown by the sweet neatness of her travelling array; the whips of the postillion cracked, the peas rattled, and the old shoes flew; one cheer more from the villagers, and Lord and Lady Hazelhatch whirled off on their journey together through life.

And a young lady, sitting in a shady nook under the red cliffs of the Isle of Wight, read in the newspaper of the splendour of the wedding, and, while adding to the good wishes of the happy couple's friends one certainly not the least sincere, felt that the last bit of turf had been firmly stamped down upon the grave of all her earthly happiness.

And perhaps it was. She may love again, you say? Yes; but will she ever feel again the electric spark of that love that comes but once to us all—when we *first* know that we are capable of loving?

Never again. It was gone, irretrievably gone. Happiness there might yet be, no doubt; but the ineffable, heaven-like emotion of first love, *that* could never return.

It is not perhaps the love itself that is so delightful, so far above all subsequent feeling; it is the discovery that we can love. Let anyone look back upon his or her past life, and, if they can, recall the circumstances of this discovery. They will own, whatever may have been the object (however unworthy) on whom they expended their youthful passion, however transitory that passion may have been, it made the happiest bit of their existence; they will own that there has come to them nothing since to equal it; and, unless they are very sanguine, they will own that there can be nothing like it in the future. To begin with, it is all-absorbing. It recks

nothing of outer circumstances, of worldly notions, of difficulties, of Mrs. Grundy. It scarcely recognizes such prosaic articles as Time and Space. It lives in itself, on itself. It is silly, beautiful, almost supernatural. And, unlike the love of after-years, it is unselfish. It delights in visions of immolating itself for the loved being; it puts a second's happiness for him or her above a thousand years of passionless existence.

And what a mistake it always is! How often it takes the good out of a man, and leaves him embittered and cynical, an Ishmael to contend against his fellow-wanderers on the plain of life. Will it survive this age of practicality, when Niagara is to adorn a tea-garden and Thirlmere supplies manufacturers with drinking-water?

Why should it? Let it go—with the age of chivalry, the days of honesty, and other cumbrous anomalies—and welcome the drab-coloured world of usefulness, the grand principles of "nothing for nothing," High Art furniture, and the Poetry of the Future!

Little Ella Bannerburn, sitting disconsolate on yonder rock, arise and adorn thy body; put pearls into thy hair and embroidered shoes upon thy feet; and descend in thy beauty upon the world of men. Study not their faces, think not of their hearts; but read their bankers' accounts, and put the totals to memory. Appraise each smile, each glance, each soft word from thy lips, which may be artfully made a little redder than Nature willed it; know the exact value of each glance of those eyes, that can—as we know—be

immensely improved by a skilful touch or two; and then, sweet Ella, when the prize is won, when thy face, jostled by bishops and actresses, is in every shop-window; when thy name is in every "Society" journal; then be not too proud to take hints from those sisters of thine, the mention of whose very names would have been an abomination to the nicer age before ours, and, casting all to the winds save social success, win it amid the applauding cheers of thy fellows, by keeping rigidly the Eleventh Commandment!

But Ella Bannerburn, reading over and over again, with dry eyes, that account of the "Wedding in High Life," does not hear us. The fruit of the Nineteenth Century Tree of Good and Evil hangs temptingly within her reach, but she will not stretch out a hand to pluck. She

turns from the newspaper to the "melancholy ocean,"—which murmurs caressingly at her feet, just as if this was a world without tempests and shipwrecks and collisions;—she watches the sea-birds dipping gracefully into the water; she sees the little fleet of fishing-boats, their browned sails flapping sullenly in the calm, dropping slowly down with the tide; and across the smooth water comes the sound of rough merriment or unskilled song; a sense of great loneliness seizes upon her heart; the quiet scene becomes all blurred and blotted out; she drops the newspaper upon the sand; the bitter tears break forth at last—

"She weeps,
And, weeping, mourns the hopes that are no more."

Oh, reigning Goddess of Common Sense, Queen of Self-interest, pity even her!

It is good to have no heart, we own, but it is sad to have one only to know it broken!

END OF BOOK I. AND OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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